FEBRUARY 2023

NEW ZEALAND

PLAYBOY

BETWEEN *BADASS* & BASIC QUINTA BRUNSON IS MORE THAN AVERAGE

20 QUESTIONS WITH DOOM PATROL STAR **DIANE GUERRERO**

THE *Art of* ATTENTION
ARTIST HANK WILLIS THOMAS' POP-CULTURE MASTERPIECE

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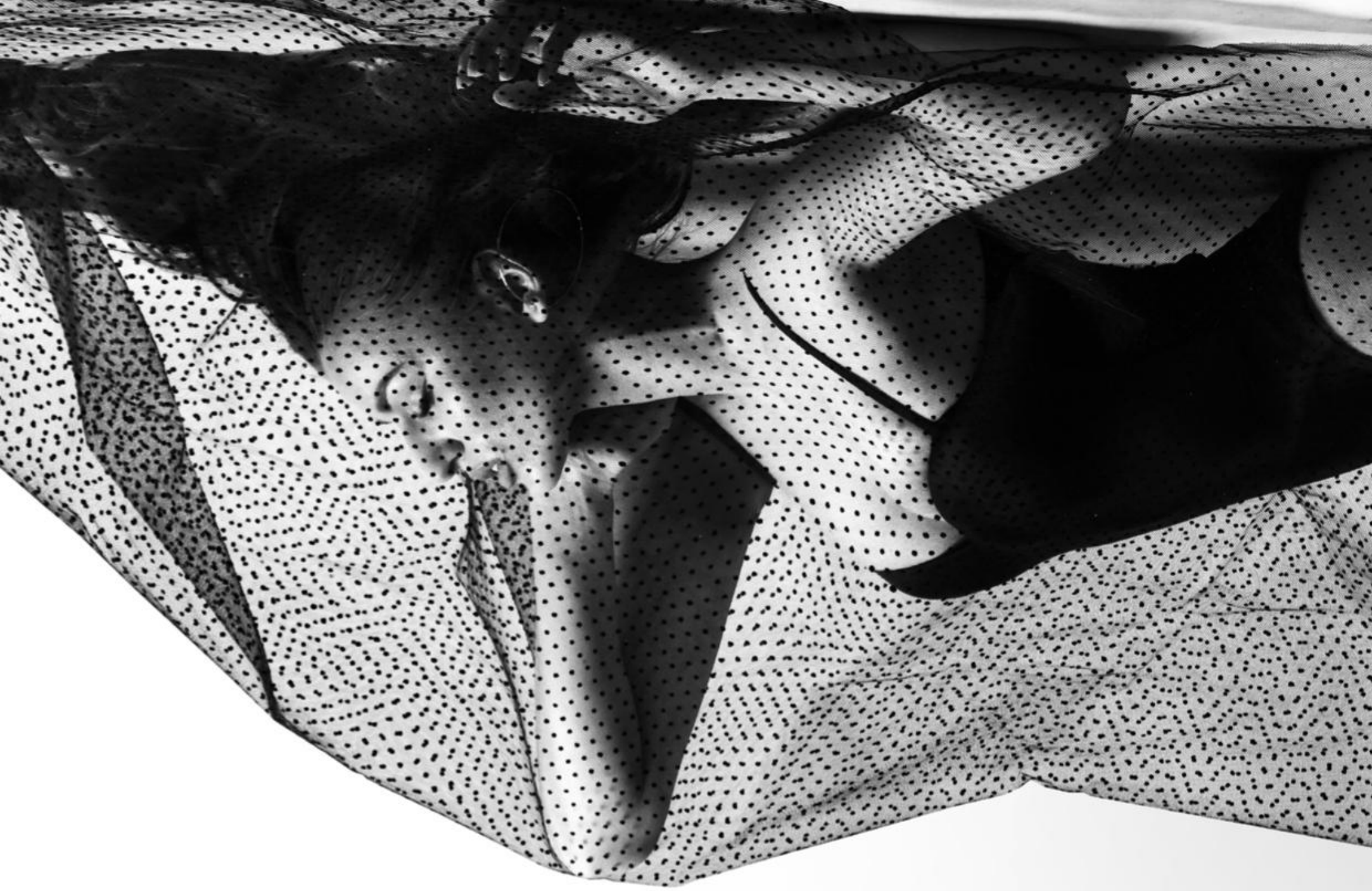

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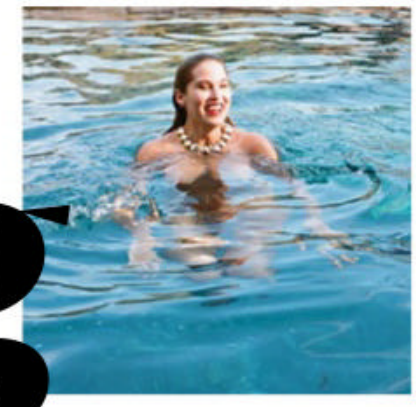
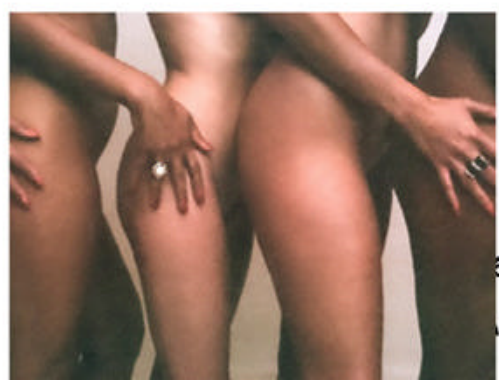


the dazzling dozen

They say you shouldn't play favorites, so we didn't: This year all 12 of our 2019 Playmates of the Month will be honored as Playmates of the Year.

"Without evolution, nothing will ever succeed. It felt right to start the decade with a big change," says Kristi Beck, Playboy's senior manager of partner strategy who helped make the decision to honor all the women instead of just one. "I'm indebted to all of our powerhouse, unique 2019 Playmates, and I'm excited to see all 12 represented as our Playmates of the Year in 2020."

Honoring collaboration over competition, all our Playmates from last year — along with 2019 PMOY Jordan Emanuel, who helped celebrate the changing of the guard — converged on a Los Angeles mansion in January for a shoot of historic proportions. The set buzzed with energy as photographers Ali Mitton and Chloe Chippendale, in collaboration with stylist Kelley Ash, captured the 12 PMOYs together (outtakes presented on this page). See the results — a veritable sisterhood of sizzle — on page 100.



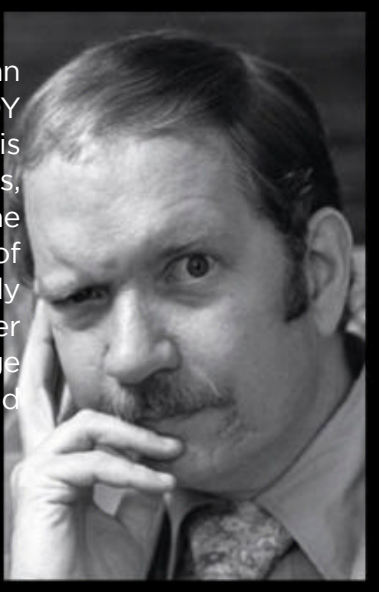
Boss Lady

When we heard Jameela Jamil (left), outspoken star of NBC's The Good Place and founder of the advocacy brand I Weigh, was interested in sitting for the *Playboy Interview*, we decided to take things a step further. Because Jamil's goal of a more inclusive world aligns with our own, we asked the entrepreneurial Brit to name some talent she felt deserved more attention. Topping the list was actresscomedian Quinta Brunson, author of this issue's defiant humor essay, Average Acceptance Now. No stranger to overachievement, Jamil was also pivotal in inviting April Playmate Marsha Elle into the Playboy family.

APlus Plus

Holly Ruprecht, our associate director of subscriptions for Playboy Plus, had quite a January. First she presided over a panel on brand partnerships alongside Plus models Elsa Jean and Ana Foxxx at the XBIZ trade show in West Hollywood (right), where Playboy Plus won the XBIZ award for nude photography site of the year. The following week Ruprecht booked it to Vegas for the AVN adult expo, where she repped the brand and sold limitededition T-shirts featuring Plus models — and where Playboy Plus collected a GFY nomination for best erotic/soft site.

Farewell, Old Friend



For more than 50 years Gahan Wilson (right) kept PLAYBOY readers entertained with his offbeat and irreverent cartoons, which typically plumbed the dark and dusty corners of human circumstance, generally to hilarious end. In November he passed away at the age of 89. Good-bye, Gahan, and thanks for all the laughs.

Getting Jazzy in June

The Playboy Jazz Festival kicks off June 6 at the Hollywood Bowl for its 42nd year. Longtime host George Lopez will emcee the slammin' two-day slate of performances from musicians including the Isley Brothers (right), Musiq Soulchild (left), Femi Kuti and the Positive Force, Anat Cohen, Allison Miller and more. Get your tickets now at HollywoodBowl.com.

Your First Pet and the Street You Grew Up On

She's not quite woman's best friend

FICTION BY
KILEY REID

ILLUSTRATION BY
CASEY WELDON

When I came back to Tucson for Christmas break, my mom was like, "You need to clean out your closet or you're not going anywhere." This was her way of being dumb about the fact that I'd gained a few pounds since I'd started college, but I was like *fine* 'cause it was whatever. I was going to buy new shit anyway. My high school friends were having a reunion, Aaron Trujillo was going to be there, and I was obviously going too. So I took a huge trash bag into my closet and started filling it up with stuff I hadn't worn or touched in years. But when I pulled out a very old Halloween costume from when my high school friends and I were Bath & Body Works flavors, underneath it, there was Magenta.

"Oh my God."

"Oh Jesus." She put her little claw in front of her face. "Shit. That's—that's a lot of light.…"

"Magenta?"

The plastic cage sat on a shelf next to my old yearbooks and duffel bags. It looked exactly the same. Neon pipes, pink hamster wheel, some toilet paper tubes and a shit ton of mulch. But Magenta was different. She looked a few years older than me, or maybe just more mature. There was new white fur underneath her eyes.

When I was little she walked quietly on all fours, but now she stood up like she had somewhere to be. On top of her gray fur Magenta wore a silky floral robe that she kept fixing and a teeny pair of Uggs that looked like they'd been in the rain. She held her robe closed, and then she waved.

"What are you…how are you still here?"

"Hey, Natalie." Magenta half laughed. "Hey — listen, this doesn't have to be weird. You grew up, you know? You had other things to do. And honestly, I totally understand." She pushed a tuft of fur behind her left ear.

I sat down on my bed. It was weird being back in my room with all of the Got Milk? ads and *Moulin Rouge!* posters taped on the wall above my twin bed. I couldn't remember the last time I saw Magenta, but it must have been when I still had braces and before my hair was red, which seemed like forever ago. I knew I was bad at remembering things (what time my classes were, if I took my birth control, quesadillas in the microwave), but I didn't think I was this bad. "Why do I remember you dying?"

"Ummm.…" Magenta winced and I saw all four of her teeth. "Maybe because a lot of your friends' pets died?"

"How would you even know that?"

"You're really loud on the phone."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"Ohmygosh, don't be. It used to give, like, a rhythm to my day. Back when you still lived here."

Magenta peeked in her pocket and I saw the glow of a tiny cellphone light up inside. She looked back up at me and smiled.

"Well," I said. "Should I feed you or something? Do you need new water?"

"I mean.…" Magenta laughed again. "If you want…?"

I stared at my hands on my lap.

"Well, I don't eat stimulants anymore, and I try to stay away from dairy," she said. "So actually, as far as food's concerned, I'm honestly all set."

I had five more days until I went back to school. I kept my closet door open because it felt awful to think of closing it. Magenta made a really big deal of putting her headphones on when I talked on the phone. When I changed my clothes she'd bury herself under a bunch of mulch or pick up a tiny fashion magazine. I knew she was trying to make me comfortable, but it just made me feel worse.

I asked my mom how long she'd been feeding Magenta.

"Well, honey, I don't *feed Magenta*." She laughed like this was a psycho thing to do. "It's not like she's a child. She just makes her grocery list and I pick up a few things."

But it wasn't just a few things. My mom wrapped a tiny iTunes gift card and put it underneath the tree. While we watched *The Devil Wears Prada* on DVD, she sat on the floor and made a mini version of those holiday buckets, the ones with three different kinds of popcorn, and she barely laughed or quoted all the parts we used to love, like when Meryl Streep is all *Why is no one readyyyy?* Or we'd be walking in the mall and she'd want to make "a really quick stop" at some weird, expensive doll store. She'd take forever, and I'd be like, *"Mom."* She'd be like, "Well, honey, Magenta can get *cold."*

"HONEY, I DON'T *FEED MAGENTA*. IT'S NOT LIKE SHE'S A CHILD."

I couldn't wait to go back to Phoenix.

At my dorm I was fucking hilarious. I didn't have class on Fridays. My roommates and I got blackout on the reg. And I did this super funny impression of our dorm's security guard as if he'd just won a million dollars. Or it's more like if he accidentally won a million dollars and he was just finding out. It sounds weird when I say it now, but I swear everyone dies for it. In Tucson I had nothing to say.

Every time I tried to tell my mom about the cool shit I was doing back home in the dorms (growing basil out my window, getting a B in finance), she'd be like, "Well, *excuuuseee* me! I guess I was mistaken, because I thought *this* was your home."

• • •

Lara Brumski was having the reunion at her parents' house. I had to buy a size large, but whatever, I looked good. Still, every time I looked at Aaron Trujillo, he was looking down at his phone. I remembered how it felt when he said Atta girl to me at graduation, when I parallel parked Lara Brumski's truck on the first try, and I just wished he would bring it up, or that someone would arrive and really need their truck parallel parked.

The only time he talked to me at the reunion was after I said I'd seen *The Blind Side* with my mom. "You actually saw that movie?"

He was sitting on the kitchen counter and both his shoes were untied, on purpose. I sucked my stomach in. "Yeah, it wasn't that bad."

"It is that bad," he said. He scratched the side of his shaved head. "It's another one of those movies where white people come in and save the day. And it's like, 'Oh hey, black people, you can be like us! Be like us and then we'll like you!' It's bullshit."

Lara Brumski grinned at me over her beer. "Didn't you say you cried?"

"*Umm,* no," I lied. "I said my mom cried."

Later, in Lara Brumski's backyard, I thought that maybe I

could fix it by drinking more. But then, in the space between Aaron and me, his phone lit up. It said *Message from MAGENTA*. Next to the *M* was a pink heart emoji, and a little mouse face was next to the *A*. My chest suddenly felt like it wasn't even there.

I stood up. "Are you serious right now?"

Aaron said, "Natalie, chill." As I walked out of the backyard, I heard him go, "It's not like anything's happened," but it didn't really seem like he was saying this to me.

Lara Brumski was standing with beers in both her hands as I walked through the kitchen and took the keys from my purse. She looked past me to the sliding glass doors and mouthed to someone, "Oh shit, he told her?"

• • •

Magenta was in pajamas and eating popcorn when I came home. I closed my bedroom door, laid facedown on my bed and began to sob into my sheets.

Magenta said, "Oh God," and then, "Natalie, wait."

I heard her little nails tap at the side of the cage. The sound made my lungs all tight and scrunched up.

"Natalie, listen," she said. "Okay wait, I swear to God? Aaron is just a friend."

I sniffed and turned away from her.

"I'm serious," she said. "He's so random and completely not my type. But even if he was, I'd never do that to you."

I put my hands underneath my face.

"Natalie, don't cry." And then she kind of laughed. "You're gonna make me cry. Do you want to come feed me a little bit?"

I shook my head.

"Come on, like old times! Remember? Man, I'm *staarrvved*. What am I gonna do?" As she said this, she was sort of singing.

I sat up straight. If I was really so loud on the phone, then Magenta knew how I'd gone down on Aaron in his car in the rec center parking lot on the Fourth of July, how I begged him to at least think about visiting me at college and how it was only two hours away. "Okay," I said. I crossed my arms. "Okay, yeah. I'd like to feed you."

Magenta laughed and said, "Really?" It was clear she thought I was joking, but when I didn't wipe the snot away from my face — I let it drip down onto my skirt — Magenta closed her mouth and walked to her bowl.

I went to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. I ripped off a stalk of some hard, green broccoli from the bottom drawer. My mom was watching *Law & Order: SVU* when I passed by the living room. When she saw the broccoli in my hand, she said, "Good for you, Nat!" Before I slammed my door I went, "Shut up, Mom!"

I threw the broccoli into Magenta's cage.

"Okay. Cooool." Magenta nodded slowly. She looked up at me and bit her bottom lip. "Can I be so annoying and ask for some olive oil?"

"No," I said. "I want you to eat it like old times."

Magenta blew through her lips. She walked to the broccoli, the bedding crunched beneath her, and she took a small floret in her hand.

"No," I said. "On all fours."

We stared at each other for what seemed like a long time. We did this until Magenta bent down and began to crawl around the broccoli. She looked as if she were in a game of charades or pretending to steal cookies from a jar that she was more than welcome to have in the first place. I felt like I was watching an adult do the hokey pokey with a child who wasn't theirs — putting their left arm in and their left arm out — at a birthday party they were obligated to attend.

Magenta took a bite. "Okay, umm, squeak squeak?" she said. "Thank you, Natalie. Yummers. Squeak squeak."

I sat down on the floor and hugged my legs.

How was I so fucking fat? Since when had my mom started doing arts and crafts? And did Aaron Trujillo really hate texting as much as he'd told me he did? Because it kind of seemed like he didn't.

Magenta came to the side of the cage and her face looked careful and sad. "Do you feel better?" she asked. "Or not so much."

I shook my head and said, "Not so much."

• • •

On my last night in Tucson, Lara Brumski texted me to say that she and Aaron made out and did some over-the-pants stuff in his parents' garage on Christmas Eve. As I packed my bags, Magenta asked me if I was okay, and we ended up talking for hours. I played my old CDs (Amy Grant, Jewel, Tori Amos, Toni Braxton), and she showed me how she charted what she ate (breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks). It wasn't as judgy as I'm making it sound. It was actually really nice.

Around midnight, I sat on my suitcase as Magenta organized her things. A little white bandanna was tied on her head, just above her ears. In a corner of her cage were three tiny boxes. One was labeled toss, one said keep, and the last one said donate.

"Hey, just to put it out there," I said, "You could drive back to Phoenix with me tomorrow. I have a closet in my dorm."

Magenta stood up and pushed her fur behind her ears. "Really?"

"It would be cool," I said. "You could even come to class if you wanted."

Obviously Magenta could be a little much, but we had history. Maybe she could help me get up in the morning since she was such an early riser. Maybe I could try some of her healthy eating habits. I felt like I could never forgive Aaron Trujillo and Lara Brumski, but I was the one who forgot Magenta was alive, and she seemed to have forgiven me. Most important, Magenta had always been mine to begin with.

"You know what?" she said. She partially closed one of her eyes.

"I think that sounds really fun."

"Really?"

"Yeah," she said. "You know what, why not? I'm gonna pack my stuff and get my cage ready to go. A change of scenery would be really good for me right now."

But the next morning, Magenta was gone. Her cage was so empty that when I walked over to it, the wheel spun around once by itself. She'd left me a little note that I read using the magnifying glass my mom had on her key chain. Magenta had gotten an internship at a magazine I'd never heard of; she was hoping to be hired soon after, and she was moving in with friends. She hadn't had the heart to tell me, but she wanted to catch up with me soon, when everything cooled down and her schedule wasn't so all over the place. She wished me all the best.

There are times I see knitted boots or a colorful robe in a dollstore window that I think Magenta would like. Something she can wear around the house. I stop and I think about sending them to her, saying something quick and nice in a card that I'd attach, but then I remember that she didn't leave her address.

Writing down my meals actually works. I've lost four pounds, and now I'm kind of dying to see Magenta at brunch or at the places where the bartenders know my name, but I also know that these are places she'd probably never go. That Christmas, when I'd shown Magenta my impression of our dorm security guard winning a million dollars, she'd said, "Sorry…it kinda sounds like I'd have to be there." ■

HOPELESS ROMANTIC

Gieorgia Kettle

Instagram **@kettlegieorgia**

Photography by **Rocky Batchelor**

18+

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Gieorgia, such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! Tell us about your daily schedule as a model, do you have a routine? Thank You so much for having me, it's a dream to be on the cover of playboy! I start my day by making my bed, then I eat breakfast, shower and do my skincare routine.

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? I want to travel the world and continue modeling. It's also a dream to start a family.

What helps you decompress and relax? I usually get a sports massage once a week just to relax my body because my work is so active but at the end of a long day, I'll wind down with some chamomile tea and Netflix with my cat.

What was the biggest lesson from your worst breakup? Breakups are always hard; I would just say being sensitive to the other person because it could be a lot harder for them than it is for you.

Are you a city traveler or nature explorer? Absolutely a nature explorer but I prefer anywhere that's near the ocean or waterfalls. I'm a bit of a water baby. I've always lived near the ocean, and I love to be in, near or around it. (That sounded a bit dirty haha).

What is the most memorable date you've ever had? The most memorable date I've had so far would have to be on holidays in New Zealand, in a hot tub looking out at Mount Remarkable with a cheese platter and a bottle of Cab Sav from a winery we visited on our way through Gibbston Valley.

What's on your travel bucket list? My heritage is English, Irish and Scottish so I would love to visit all those places even though I hate the cold, I would love to see the history and old architecture.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? On my Instagram page @kettlegieorgia, I check it daily and I always respond to people.

Who has been the most influential person in your life and why? One of the most influential people in my life would have to be my friend Sarah. She's an amazing woman who has fought so many demons in her life but always comes out on top and brought a beautiful strong daughter into this world who I also admire immensely.

How romantic are you? I would say I'm a hopeless romantic, I love gift-giving and surprising my man. When I love I love hard but only if the person gives me a reason to.

We love your Instagram, it's incredible content and well rounded? Thank you! I like to keep my aesthetic neat and tidy and I love posting reels.

THE PLAYBOY SYMPOSIUM

On Voting & Democracy

Who Counts?

BY **ALICIA GARZA**

Our *Symposium* guest editor is a Black Lives Matter co-founder and voting-rights activist; her insights into the myth of American power could not be more urgent

The Constitution of the United States took a little more than 100 days to develop, yet it has taken 200 years and counting to fully realize. In it, the framework of this nation was established, and the process for building the nation was outlined with both painstaking detail and maddening vagueness.

The Constitution sought to establish a nation where freedom could take root — through the theft of sovereign land, the attempted genocide of the original stewards of that land and the enslavement of what would turn out to be millions of human beings. In an attempt to escape the tyranny of a corrupt monarchy, the so-called founding fathers mimicked much of what they left behind.

The project of building a new nation, while in some ways a departure from the most egregious offenses experienced under monarchical rule, was still predicated on the principles of power over rather than power with. The result was a new nation built on a system that had existed for hundreds of years: one person at the top, now with a series of checks and balances to ensure that no one person could abuse their power. In the end, more people got to be powerful, and rules were designed to make sure those powerful people kept their power.

Power, broadly defined, is the ability to make decisions over your own life and the lives of others. There are different forms of power, and political power — the ability to decide how decisions are made — is what the Constitution sought to establish. The Constitution did not seek to transform power itself, nor did it ever promise to. Instead, it ensured that more people had access to the ultimately corrupt forms of power that some had been denied.

The Constitution was an extraordinarily ambitious project but perhaps one that was doomed to fail from its inception.

I think about the Constitution often these days. I wonder how it came to be that a few dozen dudes with powdered wigs and slaves could come together for a few months and hammer out a whole series of systems that would not only have an undeniable impact on my life many generations later but would also set the terms for the fights of today. Did the dudes in wigs anticipate that 200-plus years later we would have someone leading the country with a wig of much lower caliber?

All insults aside, I've heard it said many times that the Constitution was designed for moments like this one, when everything is at stake. I don't have any way of knowing what its authors' intentions were — given the fact that people like me were counted as only three fifths of a human being, primarily for the purpose of apportioning power and resources — but I can confidently say this: Who counts, who gets to decide and who shapes the rules that define what the decisions are in the first place — all of this matters. A lot.

Who counts is predicated, at least in the Constitution of this nation, on power — who gets it, who doesn't. That is why no woman was assured the right to vote until the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920 — a century ago this year and 133 years after the Constitution was written. It is why a black person who was enslaved did not count as a whole person until 1868, three years after slavery was formally abolished and more than 80 years after the first draft of the Constitution was written.

Millions of people across the nation show up every four years to make their opinions known. Who makes the rules, and who shapes the terrain on which the rules are made, is arguably more important than our political parties and the ideologies that once defined them. Meanwhile, voter suppression, gerrymandering and redistricting loom over our polling places, along with a host of other pressing issues including climate disaster, police violence, equal pay and health care.

This year brings a new decade as well as what may be one of the most important elections of my lifetime. There is much more at stake than who becomes the commander in chief; this is a fight for who counts and who gets to shape the laws the rest of us are governed by. What happens in the 2020 election will have an undeniable impact on the structure and function of democracy itself.

Over the past decade we saw social movements emerge across the country, from Occupy Wall Street to Idle No More to Black Lives Matter to MeToo to the Women's March. These movements unearthed what had previously been below the surface: financial instability as a result of the rampant speculation and greed allowed by capitalism; climate devastation and its human impact; state-sanctioned violence and antiblack racism; racialized resentment and antagonism; sexual assault and violence at the hands of the powerful. What was once invisible erupted like geysers, and finally the whole world could witness, examine, contemplate and take a side.

The writers in this Symposium are some of the sharpest thinkers and doers in the country. They are the courageous ones who stand with those who have not had a seat at the table, those the table was deliberately designed not to accommodate. Here, we explore critical questions facing our country today: who matters, how change happens, who is being left behind and what we can do to transform the way power operates — once and for all.

Alicia Garza is co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement and founder of Black Futures Lab, which aims to empower black voters.

ILLUSTRATION BY **GEORGE MCCALMAN**

As Goes the South

BY **LATOSHA BROWN**

If you think the South is a bastion of retrograde conservatism, a co-founder of Black Voters Matter has news for you

In October 2018 I pulled up to a community center in Jefferson County, Georgia to meet with a group of senior citizens and talk about the importance of voting. Many of them had heard of the Black Voters Matter bus — what we call the "Blackest Bus in America" — and they wanted to go outside and see it. So we wrapped up the program, went out to the bus and had an impromptu pep rally, singing and dancing to the music of James Brown and Al Green.

My new friends asked if they could ride the bus down the block to vote early as a group. After folks had hopped on and just as we were pulling away, staffers from the center stopped us. Someone had seen the "black" bus and called a local official, who told the center to unload the seniors immediately.

These were fully competent adults who wanted to go vote. The official had no legal right to stop our trip. Sadly, this is only one of countless examples of politicians choking the black vote through apparent fear and intimidation.

When people hear stories about Jefferson County and other places in the South, they assume these are staunchly Republican states and always will be. The truth is the South is the fastest-growing region in the country and is becoming more racially and politically diverse. The South has 10 of the 15 most rapidly expanding cities in the nation. This growth is driven primarily by young people, LGBTQ people and people of color. In 2018 and 2016, millennials and other younger generations outvoted baby boomers and other older cohorts. These young voters tend to identify as independents, but they also tend to support progressive policies and candidates.

In 2019 Democrats won total control of Virginia's government — both chambers of the legislature and the governorship — for the first time in more than two decades. Kentucky elected a Democratic governor over a Republican incumbent who had modeled himself after Trump. And a Democratic governor won a second term in Louisiana. The South, even the Deep South, is not as red as many people believe it to be.

In 2018 we witnessed an increase in Democratic turnout in the heart of the Confederacy, including Georgia, Alabama, Texas and Mississippi. Part of the surge was inspired by younger, more dynamic candidates such as Stacey Abrams, Andrew Gillum and Beto O'Rourke. There is tremendous growth potential for progressives to win in the South, especially for candidates willing to expand the electorate and bring in new voters.

Demographics are changing, but demographics are not destiny. The biggest threat to building power and expanding democracy in the South is voter suppression. It comes in many forms, including the fear and intimidation we saw in Jefferson County, structural and policy barriers to voting, and misinformation to confuse voters and drive down their interest in turning out. On Election Day in 2018, for example, law enforcement in Jackson, Mississippi set up roadblocks near a polling site. In Crisp County, Georgia seven law-enforcement vehicles arrived to issue a parking ticket to a black city commissioner who had offered rides to the polls all day in a borrowed limousine.

Since Republicans can't win on their ideas, they've taken to cheating by way of purging voters from the rolls, passing restrictive voter-ID laws, gerrymandering, shutting down polling locations and more. In 2018 election officials in Randolph County, Georgia tried to close down seven of the nine polling places in the predominantly black community. The county abandoned the plan only after an overwhelming public outcry and national media attention.

Some 36 states have voter-ID laws that require people to possess specific forms of identification in order to vote. In Texas a gun license is an acceptable document, but a student ID is not. Voter-ID laws set up hurdles that hurt poor people, people of color, students and others who can't afford the required documents or have other reasons for lacking identification. Nationwide, up to 25 percent of African American citizens of voting age don't have government-issued photo IDs, compared with only eight percent of whites.

When all else fails, election officials simply kick voters off the rolls, erasing their right to vote as though they never existed. Nationwide, at least 17 million voters were purged from the rolls between 2016 and 2018, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law. Georgia alone just booted about 300,000 voters under a new state provision that encourages purges when voters are "inactive."

As if this weren't enough, disinformation campaigns specifically targeted black voters in 2016 and may do so again in 2020. The Russian Internet Research Agency used Facebook ads, memes and fake websites to discourage black people from voting. On social media platforms, a U.S. Senate committee found, "no single group of Americans was targeted…more than African Americans." These efforts were shockingly successful: In 2016, for the first time in 20 years, black voter turnout for a presidential election declined.

So how do we shift the South? First, we disrupt the culture of fear by creating hope. We need to empower progressive candidates and campaigns that will build a coalition of diverse voters and challenge structural barriers to voting. We should not look at the South as a region that's deeply conservative but a region that's severely underfunded, its people's power underutilized.

We can build a more just America, and the South is ground zero for this transformation. Once we shift the power dynamics rooted in fear and divisiveness in the South, we will shift this nation. We believe that our work in the South will make the difference.

We are doing the work. Ultimately we will win.

LaTosha Brown is co-founder of Black Voters Matter and the Southern Black Girls and Women's Consortium.

Before the Ballot

BY **RASHAD ROBINSON**

The Color of Change president explains how voters can tip the scales toward real criminal justice

Not every vote has the same impact. I don't say that because some people's votes are disqualified for politically motivated reasons or because the electoral college renders some people's votes less potent than others'. All that is true. What I mean to say is that whether we get what we want from our votes has little to do with the election itself. Our votes lead to change only when a social movement backs them up.

This has certainly been the case with recent successes in criminal-justice reform. The 2020 candidates are talking about this issue today because we made reform feel possible and necessary in our communities and our culture first.

We currently lock up more people in jails, detention centers and prisons than any other country in the world: around 2.3 million, one in five of them for nonviolent drug offenses. We ensnare another nearly 4.5 million people in the probation and parole system, which often serves as just another way to exploit them financially before ultimately sending many of them back to jail or prison. On any given night American jails house 731,000 people, 76 percent of whom haven't been convicted of a crime. Most people get trapped in the system because they can't afford bail, which prosecutors and judges often set out of reach.

And that doesn't even include the policing side of criminal justice: the life-altering and community-destroying violations of our rights, the harassment and violence (including sexual violence) committed by law enforcement officers across the country every day, largely targeting communities of color. The entire system, in fact, is defined by racial bias and racial disparities — from prosecutors who pursue harsher sentences for black people than for white people for the same crime to an incarcerated population that is 40 percent black, even though black people represent only 13 percent of the U.S. population. "Reform" doesn't begin to capture what's needed, but it's the first step.

The movement pushing for reform in this space has risen over the past several years, amplified by social media and online organizing campaigns. It made politicians accountable long after the election was over and made them deliver on real policy change. But it didn't happen overnight.

On the first day of 2009, Oscar Grant was killed, and footage of his death subsequently went viral. Residents in Oakland, California took to the streets in protest. The recording of George Zimmerman's 911 call moments before he shot and killed Trayvon Martin in 2012 was shared on social media and moved Floridians into action, along with millions of their allies across the country. Then, in the summer of 2014, came the uprising in Ferguson, Missouri after the killing of Michael Brown. St. Louis–area activists not only demanded an end to police violence but also showed how money bail, excessive ticketing and other exploitative, racially driven practices had become so standard that city budgets were sustained on the backs of the black people they targeted. The 2015 death of Sandra Bland in Texas moved more people to raise their voices about abusive policing, pre-trial detention in jail and the refusal of local prosecutors to hold law enforcement accountable.

These moments and many others became highly visible symbols of the day-to-day injustice in our system and empowered a new wave of activism focused on racial justice. Everyday people were driven into the streets, into the media, into public service and into philanthropic endeavors.

And then into the polls. We used the vote to end the careers of politicians standing in the way of reform and to elevate those committed to it. New, black-led initiatives (like those of my own organization, Color of Change) sprouted across the country,

aiming to channel the new wave of energy into the political process. While the federal debate is important, more than 80 percent of America's prison population is incarcerated at the local and state levels. We put forward-thinking district attorneys, judges, sheriffs, governors and attorneys general on the ballot and made sure they got into office. Afterward, continued pressure made them deliver on their promises. This new political influence is a result of efforts by formerly incarcerated people and others from impacted communities — all essential leaders in campaigns targeting money-bail profiteers, changing what the public demands from prosecutors and so much more.

The power of culture also helped amplify the power of our movement and, ultimately, the power of our votes. Michelle Alexander's best-selling book The New Jim Crow, as well as Ava DuVernay's Emmy-winning documentary 13th and recent Netflix series When They See Us are just a few examples of popular media that helped paint a clearer picture of a violently unjust criminal-justice system. Jay-Z, John Legend, Colin Kaepernick and many others, including those behind the scenes brave enough to move such projects forward, took on money bail, policing and other issues. They've all helped disrupt deeply held beliefs about crime and punishment that are rooted in racism and capitalism, and their efforts fuel the larger movement.

That momentum has forced politicians and decision makers to do things they didn't want to do, thought they couldn't do or thought they could get away with not doing. Candidates in 2020, from those running for prosecutor to those running for president, are all talking about criminal-justice reform. Former vice president Joe Biden, Senator Kamala Harris and others have been compelled to answer for their past criminal-justice policies. This line of questioning would have been unthinkable in the 2012 election. We've changed the standards for what it takes to win our votes.

Very little in politics just happens. Political discourse is guided by the public's demand for change. Criminal justice is now inextricably tied to the ballot because people forced the issue into public debate. But no matter what happens at the polls in November, our work isn't done. We have to ensure that once the election is over, campaign rhetoric translates into legal action. We have to continue to make our voices heard before our votes can drive change.

Rashad Robinson is president of Color of Change, a leading racial-justice organization with more than 1.5 million members.

Two Evils

BY **ANGELA PEOPLES**

When is “party solidarity” worse than voting your conscience–especially for marginalized Americans? A grassroots political strategist weighs in

As Democrats place their bets on who will lead the party in the fight to defeat President Trump in November, a consensus has emerged among the base: We must get behind the candidate with the best chance of beating 45, no matter what. "Party solidarity" suggests that voters should support the nominee put forth by one of the two dominant political parties — even if that candidate has a history of racist policymaking or of mistreatment of women or simply doesn't align with one's core values. This mentality degrades our democratic system and stifles the power of this country's emerging majority.

Let's be clear: The consequences of elections are real. Countless lives have been lost or forever damaged by Trump's presidency. The desire to vote him out by any means necessary is visceral and righteous; it is about our survival. But voters must remember that we have options in 2020. Polls have shown that most of the top-ranked Democrats would beat Trump in a general election. Before we dust off those "lesser of two evils" talking points, it's important to seriously consider the short- and long-term impact on historically disenfranchised voters. In effect, we could be asking them to set aside their conscience and cast their vote for a politician who may not be the worst-case scenario but is certainly close.

During the 2012 Democratic National Convention, Representative John Lewis said, "Your vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have to create a more perfect union." As corruption, outsize corporate influence and foreign interference continue to erode our government and election systems, the urgency of Lewis's words becomes more evident. For many Americans, especially those who have historically been denied the right to participate in the system, voting is one of the few bits of political capital we have — an investment in our values and a chance to ensure those values are reflected in political and legal institutions. What is a voter to do with this most "precious" and "sacred" resource when the only options are candidates with track records of acting against your values and pursuing policies that cause irrevocable harm to your community?

Voting for a candidate just because you think they have the best chance of winning directly reinforces white supremacy. The idea of electability is based on who has historically been able to run for office and cast a vote in this country. Whether it was the three-fifths compromise, literacy tests, prison walls, poll taxes, the recent voter-ID laws or voter-roll purges, our federal and state governments have gone to great lengths to ensure that the vast majority of people deciding who is electable are straight cis white men with means.

Even as the pool of eligible voters becomes more black, brown, young and progressive, the mainstream continues to prioritize the same demographic over and over again, just as the founding fathers intended.

This trend of voting for the party's nominee against your better judgment also weakens the political power of women and people of color. Take for example the case of Governor Ralph "Blackface" Northam of Virginia. In the summer of 2017 I led a project called In Charge: Black Women Taking Action. Our mission was to organize black women to get out the vote for governor. Northam was your textbook "safe bet" Democratic nominee, and he was running against Ed Gillespie, who ran a campaign that was deemed overtly racist and bigoted. Northam was certainly the "lesser of two evils," but there was nothing about his candidacy that would draw black voters out in the numbers he needed to win. Groups including BlackPAC and Collective PAC worked to mobilize black women and community leaders to vote. Northam became governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia due in large part to high turnout among black voters in the Hampton Roads and Virginia Beach areas.

It stands to reason that if black voters played a significant role in handing Northam the gubernatorial election, then black community voices would receive significant weight and consideration in his decisions. But when Northam was accused of appearing in blackface in a photo that surfaced at the beginning of last year, he ignored the calls of thousands of his black and brown constituents and refused to resign. The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus issued a statement calling for his resignation, and NAACP leaders organized a number of protests in the state, but Northam remains in office, having faced little to no consequences. His refusal to bow to political pressure from the very people who elected him is more harmful to black voters than 10 pictures of him in blackface: It sends a message to future candidates and the general public that it's actually not necessary to be accountable to black people and anti-racist voters. It means that even overtly racist behavior in the past is excusable if your opponent is just a little bit more racist.

I regret asking black women in Virginia to vote for a candidate like Ralph Northam. I won't make the same mistake in 2020.

This election cycle, I'm committed to organizing with black voters and progressive voters to support a candidate who not only aligns with my values but is enthusiastically ready to be accountable to my community. With so much at stake, we can't afford to just donate our vote — that most precious and sacred tool John Lewis spoke of — in the name of "party solidarity."

Angela Peoples is co-founder of cultural and political brand the South and director of Black Womxn For.

Silencing the Status Quo

BY **MARISA FRANCO**

When American outsiders organize, their combined voices can change elections—and the co-founder of Mijente has proof

The act of casting a vote in an election is one of the largest mass political rituals in this country. For many millions of people, it's the only explicitly political act they perform. But for many millions of others, voting feels like a futile effort.

Compared with other democratic countries, the U.S. has had one of the lowest voter-turnout percentages in recent years. Over the past 40 years, an average of 62.7 percent of the country's eligible population has exercised their right to vote. Why is more than a third of the American populace opting out?

Voting functions as a political oil change. In ideal circumstances it allows for an organized battle of ideas and ensures a smooth transition between elected representatives. But for groups of people who constantly face structural oppression, the maintenance of a system that doesn't serve them is of little concern. Despite the pervasive narrative in the media, the lack of turnout isn't all about apathy. It may actually be an active expression of discontent with the status quo.

During the 2018 midterm elections, my organization, Mijente, focused its efforts on mobilizing Latinx immigrants in Georgia. We knocked on thousands of doors to talk with voters about the governor's race, advocating for Stacey Abrams. We anticipated pushback from Latinx voters but found instead that people were curious. In conversations they wondered if their vote actually mattered and whether there was a substantive difference between the political parties. Mostly, however, they revealed that no one ever came to speak to them about elections.

Those immigrant and Latinx voters in Georgia, along with all other infrequent or inactive voters, must be welcomed into the conversation before it's time to vote if we want them to show up. The critical act of voting must be combined with collective organizing efforts — in advance — if we want the elected to represent the entire population and not just a privileged fraction of it.

Although individuals run for office and individuals cast ballots, it's collective groups who set the terms of the debates leading up to the election. Following the 2008 election of Barack Obama and amid one of the most significant financial crises in the century, we saw the rise of the Tea Party. One of the movement's major tenets was fiscal conservatism: It took a hard line against increasing the national debt. This became the dominant issue of discussion, which prevented the government from addressing social issues that would require funding.

Under the Trump administration, on the other hand, fiscal hawks have become crickets. Rising debt has become insignificant as plans to build border walls and wage wars abroad have taken precedence. In both instances, organized and well-resourced groups have created political terms that have real policy impact. Nothing in politics is serendipitous.

Now more than ever, political underdogs are stepping up and making sure their collective voices are heard. Over the past several electoral cycles, undocumented communities have demanded a stop to deportations. In doing so, they have affected public perception of immigration policy and disrupted preconceived notions of who gets to speak about these issues. Similarly, when the Sunrise Movement gained traction last fall, candidates were forced to take positions on climate change and the Green New Deal.

These organizers contest the notion that all we need to do is maintain business as usual. Their efforts have also helped shape the candidate pool for this coming election. An unprecedented number of women and LGBTQ people, many of them community organizers and advocates, are running for office. These insurgent campaigns challenge the GOP as well as the Democratic Party status quo. On a smaller scale, several states are becoming electoral battlegrounds where the political parties that have comfortably held power are being challenged. The 2019 election results in Virginia demonstrated this as Democrats took control of the previously red state. As the Latinx population grows, states like Arizona and Texas are likely to begin trending in this direction as well.

A record 32 million Latinxs are projected to be eligible to vote in this year's election, making them the largest racial and ethnic minority group in the electorate. An estimated 27 percent of those who cast ballots in the 2018 midterms were firsttime midterm voters. Our power, as outsiders, is rising.

Those of us who have been targeted by the Make America Great Again narrative have an opportunity to reshape the terms of the election. We can use our vote to ensure that democracy is not simply a ritual by which we choose the "lesser of two evils" but a system that offers viable options for political representation.

Through deep organizing we can motivate people to fight like hell for the solutions we seek to the challenges of our time. In doing so, we can make our government work for the many — like every democracy should — instead of for the few.

Marisa Franco is co-founder of Mijente, a social-justice hub for Latinx and Chicanx people. She is based in Arizona.

average
acceptance
now

Notes of a web-slaying comedian and ***Black Lady Sketch Show*** cast member who's fed up with the insane demands of capitalism, showbiz and social media

BY **QUINTA BRUNSON**

In 2016 I went to the Shorty Awards, a show that honors greatness in internet culture, at which you can be nominated for top comedy performance of the year along with a dog that went viral for having a tongue that hangs out all the time. It's humbling.

Anyhoo, I took a picture on the green carpet of an awards show I didn't necessarily want to be at. In all honesty, I was embarrassed. I dreamt of the Emmys, the Golden Globes — even the ESPYs, where I would present an award and offer comic relief next to LeBron James. An internet awards show felt beneath me.

I posted the green-carpet selfie on Instagram. For the most part the comments were kind and complimentary, filled with "yes girl!" and "slay gorgeous." But there was one that has stuck with me for four years.

"Eh, she's so average looking."

Average. I don't know if the person who wrote that comment meant to insult me but.… I take it back; I'm pretty sure that was 100 percent their intention. My first thought was no thought. The comment just kind of had me staring at it and trying to understand how I felt, whether to care and if I should say something back. I didn't, but I did care. At that point in my career I wanted to be outstandingly good at my job and to be considered pretty at least. I thought what probably everyone has thought, including the person who left the comment: In order to be worth something in this world, you have to be above average.

One definition of average is "the usual or ordinary standard, level or quantity." If anything, average sounds, dare I say, *comfortable?* Constantly fighting to be more than average or even less than average seems exhausting, like entering yourself in a race you can't win while committing to being sweaty and out of breath for the rest of your life. When I had this epiphany, years later, I knew I needed to reevaluate my place in the endless race — and to ask myself why I wanted to run it in the first place.

I needed to take a stand: Average Acceptance Now.

Like most of us, I was taught to aim for the stars. In school we were told, "Look at George Washington Carver. He fucking invented peanut butter. You should strive to be just as amazing." And look, I get it. I really do. But I wish I'd also learned something like "Look at Ms. Johnson, your computer teacher. She loves her job and has a nice house and a cool family."

For me, a little girl who grew up on the west side of Philly, right at the intersection of the rich kids from UPenn and my friends who robbed the rich kids from UPenn, more realistic portrayals of a good life might have helped. While I think George Washington Carver was absolutely a fucking G, I wish I could have been impressed by my own father, a man who went to work and took care of his family every day. (Also, I wish I had noticed the boys at school instead of worshiping Omarion from B2K and actually thinking I had a shot with him.)

Dear capitalism: Your insistence on obscene wealth is partly to blame. Bernie and Warren talk about the vanishing middle class, which is great, but what about America's *average* class? After all, their electorate includes countless Americans who are not extraordinary or basic. The *We're the Millers* of the world. Pleasantly average.

Mainstream media, you're guilty too: You've promoted unhealthy and unattainable standards of beauty that have disturbed the psyches of all genders in America. You tell us that anything less than physical perfection is shameful — unless we have some weird quirk that can be marketed as "strong" or "brave" instead. But I'm not going to give you another lashing for your part in the war on the average. You get it every day, and you don't care. No, instead I'm going to focus on an issue closer to my heart.

The regular black girl can barely exist and be praised for it the way "everyday beautiful" starlets like Saoirse Ronan, Emma Stone and Brie Larson are. Don't get me wrong, I think these women are beautiful, but I don't see the same attention lavished on your everyday beautiful black girl actress or singer. If you happen to look like the average black girl, you're subject to scrutiny over whether or not you're attractive, the ways in which you look like an animal or a man and why women like you should be liked based on your talent, not your looks. Social media and the inflated currency of likes and shares are also to blame. We're all caught in the dirty cycle.

So I'm going to help break that cycle. I started here: Over the New Year's weekend, I went to Big Bear, California with some friends. I was so excited about heading to a cabin with people who have known me for years and always loved me for who I am. But on the way there, zigzagging through majestic mountains, I received a text. I was invited to a New Year's party thrown by a celebrity back in Los Angeles. Part of me wanted to somehow race back to the city and show

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MANCY GANT**

In school we were told, "Look at George Washington Carver. He fucking invented peanut butter."

face at this party — to take bomb pictures and really flex on the 'gram. To be among the above average and prove I was one of them.

Not this time. Why would I want to go to a party where I would be forced to evaluate my status every other second, hovering over the snacks table and agonizing, *Am I famous too? Just a little bit? Like goofyfriend-in-1980s-sitcom famous at least?*

So I responded, "Thank you so much for the invite. I got my own things going on. All the best in the new year."

I chose my life.

I shut my phone off, looked around the car and almost shed one single G tear from the overabundance of peace I felt. I had left the race and decided to sit at the finish line. Because it turns out the finish line isn't at the end of the race at all; it's wherever people love your average-ass self.

Oh, and the anonymous user who left that mean comment on my Shorty Awards pic? Reader, I went to that person's page. They looked exactly like me. I hope I've embodied their every word.

SF SX: THE DIRTY MIND GUIDE 2 TALKING DIRTY

HEADQUARTERS OF THE DIRTY MIND, A COLLECTIVE OF SUBVERSIVE REBELS FIGHTING FOR SEXUAL FREEDOM IN A DYSTOPIAN SAN FRANCISCO.

ALL RIGHT, SLUTS!! CLASS IS NOW IN SESSION.

WELCOME TO YOUR THIRD DAY OF DIRTY MIND SEX WORKER ORIENTATION.

DOMINA CASIE
- BONDAGE AFICIONADO
- DAPPER PUNK

MX. SYLVIA
- TECH GENIUS
- MISTRESS OF DISGUISE

THOSE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT ASSHOLES IN THE PARTY KEEP GAINING MORE POWER, SURVEILLING AND POLICING EVERYONE'S SEXUAL FREEDOM.

IF WE'RE GONNA SURVIVE WE NEED UNITY, AND THAT STARTS IN THIS ROOM, WITH OUR SPECIAL BRAND OF PERVERTED EDUCATION.

WE'VE BEEN OVER DISCIPLINE, PUNISHMENT, SADOMASOCHISM AND SOME BASIC FETISHES.

TODAY WE'RE GONNA TRAIN YOU TO TALK DIRTY! HOW TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT DESIRES! THE PARTY WANTS TO DENY US OUR ABILITY TO EXPRESS OURSELVES! OBSCENITY HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT!

I'M ALWAYS AFRAID I'M GONNA SOUND SILLY WHEN I TALK DIRTY!

YEAH, I FREEZE UP AND CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING TO SAY.

ANY QUESTIONS BEFORE WE START?

DON'T WORRY. WE'LL MAKE CUNNING LINGUISTS OUT OF EVERY LAST ONE OF YOU.

CAN WE FOCUS? AND TRY NOT TO DISTRACT THE STUDENTS, SYLVIA?

WHAAAAAAT? WE'RE ALL ADULTS HERE!

I DESIGNED THIS LITTLE HOLOGRAM SHOW FOR OUR PRESENTATION.

IT'LL RESPOND TO YOU AS YOU LEARN.

CLICK!

OOOOOOHHOOH

LET'S START WITH ANATOMY WORDS. WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITES?

ARMS

NIPPLES

LEGS

MOUTH

TITS

ASS

WAIST

HIPS

ONCE YOU KNOW WHAT WORDS YOU LIKE TO DESCRIBE YOUR OWN BODY, YOU CAN REFER TO YOURSELF THAT WAY. WHEN I SAY "STROKE MY COCK-

-JUST LIKE THAT," IT SIGNALS TO MY PARTNER THAT THESE WORDS TURN ME ON AND I FEEL AFFIRMED BY THEM.

IF SOMEONE SAYS, "I WANT YOU IN MY HOLE RIGHT THE FUCK NOW..."

THEN YOU CAN RESPOND WITH SOMETHING LIKE "YOUR HOLE LOOKS SO HUNGRY!"

SEX

SEX IS ALL ABOUT ACTION. SO LET'S TAKE A STROLL THROUGH THE DIRTY MIND TO EXPLORE SOME OF OUR FAVORITE VERBS!

I REALLY LOVE THE WAY YOU SLOBBER ALL OVER MY TITS.

FUCK ME!

HARD!

UH!

YEAH, YOU LIKE IT WHEN I SPANK YOU, DON'T YOU, YOU LITTLE SLUT?

YOU CAN USE THESE WORDS AS COMMANDS, LIKE "POUND ME RIGHT THIS SECOND, DADDY" OR "LICK BETWEEN MY TOES!"

OR AS EXPRESSIONS OF DESIRE, LIKE "I CAN'T WAIT TO FLIP YOU OVER AND EAT YOUR ASS TILL YOU GUSH ALL OVER THE PLACE."

I WANT YOU TO COME OVER AND SIT YOUR WET, HOT, DRIPPING PUSSY ON MY FACE!

OR AS INSTRUCTIONS -- "I WANT YOU TO PUSH ALL OF THAT SPUNK OUT OF YOUR CUNT INTO MY MOUTH."

NEXT UP: DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE. ACCENTUATE THOSE NOUNS WITH ADJECTIVES LIKE PUFFY NIPPLES OR HAIRY ARMPITS OR SWEATY COLLARBONE.

RAMP IT UP WITH ADVERBS: CHOKE ME HARDER; I'M GONNA TICKLE YOU LIGHTLY; THAT MAKES ME OPEN EVEN WIDER!

Sweet

Wet

Thick

gorgeous

ADJECTIVES MAKE FOR GREAT COMPLIMENTS, AND WHAT'S A BIGGER TURN-ON THAN FLATTERY? THE POINT OF DIRTY TALK IS TO TURN OURSELVES ON, TO MAKE OTHERS FEEL GOOD. BEING SEEN, TOUCHED, WORSHIPPED OR APPRECIATED DOES WONDERS FOR THAT!

STRIPPERS ARE REALLY GOOD AT COMPLIMENTS!

i can't believe how big and strong you are.

GOD! YOUR HAIR SMELLS SOOOOO DELICIOUS, I JUST WANNA BURY MY FACE IN IT!

YOUR THIGHS LOOK UNBELIEVABLE.

PLAYMATE

Kyra Marie

Instagram **@kyra_belanger**

Photography by **Top Enterprise Publications**

PLAYMATE

Hello

Playboy World! Kyra Marie has arrived...

PLAYMATE

PLAYMATE

Tell us something surprising about you? Something surprising about me is I used to be a competitive figure skater. I started figure skating at the age of 12 and I fell in love with the sport.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy? I was incredibly excited to have the opportunity to shoot for Playboy. Getting the cover solidifies my modeling career.

What inspires you? What inspired me are my parents. They are always supportive and motivate me to achieve my goals in life.

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modeling? Modeling has always been something I wanted to pursue as a career since I've always had the height and the look, everything else came naturally.

Who do you look up to in the modeling industry? In the modeling industry, I look up to Heidi Klum. She is a German Victoria's Secret Angel who has not only modeled for the biggest names in the industry but she is also is a TV host, TV producer, a mother, and a businesswoman.

What are some of your hobbies? My hobbies are working out, cooking and dancing.

Name three things on your bucket list? The three things on my bucket list are to travel the world, skydive, and to be on the cover of Vogue.

Turn-ons... My biggest turn-ons are a good sense of humor, height (since I'm 6ft tall), and eye contact.

Turn-offs... My biggest turn-offs are arrogance, rudeness and seriousness.

Describe to us your perfect date... My perfect date would be an evening boat ride, with champagne toasts, chef served dinner and dessert.

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why? The world capital I would most like to visit is Paris. Paris is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. It has the reputation of being a romantic and cultural city.

What is your mantra? My mantra would be to be kind when possible, it's always possible.

Diane Guerrero

20Q

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KELIA ANNE**

What makes a superhero? A voice, a cause and a will to change the world. The actress-activist, who headlines the HBO Max premiere of DC's **Doom Patrol**, has all three and isn't backing down

BY **SAMANTA HELOU HERNANDEZ**

Q1: *Orange Is the New Black gave you your most notable role to date — Maritza Ramos, one of Litchfield Penitentiary's original inmates. On the show's final season, which debuted on Netflix in July, Ramos is deported to Colombia, mirroring what happened to your parents nearly two decades ago, when you were 14 years old. How did you prepare for those scenes?*

GUERRERO: I didn't have to look far to understand what it would be like for my character to be in jail once again, to be taken away. I know what that's like. My mom was taken in handcuffs to the airport and loaded up on a plane. It's something I've lived with my entire life. It's desperate; it's lonely. So I tried to go back to that time. Honestly, because of the work I'm doing today, I'm back there all the time. It was cathartic.

Q2: *So it wasn't retraumatizing?*

GUERRERO: No, no, no. What's retraumatizing is knowing that some fucking guy went to a Walmart and shot up people because he thought there was an invasion of Mexicans, because of what our president has said. That's retraumatizing. That instills fear in me that my life can be taken away at any time. Portraying it artistically, or even retelling my story, as hard as that is at times, is a means to an end. That's not retraumatizing.

Q3: *You revealed your parents' deportation in a 2014 op-ed piece in the Los Angeles Times, and in 2016 you released a memoir, In the Country We Love, about growing up in the U.S. without them. What motivated you to share your story and become an activist for immigration reform?*

GUERRERO: My career was moving very fast, but I felt I wasn't being honest. I felt deceitful not speaking about something that was very real to me. The issue of immigration was being tossed around inaccurately, and Trump was using the immigrant community as a scapegoat. What do you do when your community is flat-out labeled as rapists and murderers, and people run with that narrative? I couldn't offer a general response as a person of color, as a brown woman. I had to be like, "Yo, as a child of a separated family, as a child coming from a marginalized community that often experiences incarceration… I'm speaking to you as a child who lived all of this." I wanted people to look at me, see me and know what the fuck I'm about.

Q4: *How did you find a space to inhabit in this country?*

GUERRERO: If your circumstances bring you to a place where someone has to be charitable to you, you develop a habit of wanting to be invincible out of needing to appease folks. I got to the point of wanting to kill myself; that's how invincible I wanted to get. I had to see a therapist, who told me that it was okay to want things and to have dreams. I had to change the way I was programmed by reciting affirmations that I was worthy. That's how I began, little by little, to take up space again. But it's a work in progress. I work every day to not shrink myself, to allow myself to speak freely in places I'm scared to speak.

Q5: *In August you told Vanity Fair that you feared becoming a "poster child of deportation." Do you feel that you have?*

GUERRERO: No, I don't. I thought people were trying to pigeonhole me. In reality, only you can pigeonhole yourself. Only you can allow people to put you in a box. I am who I am. I care about what I care about. I'm strong in my convictions. I dictate my future. I dictate my outcome. Deportation, what happened to my family, is a sliver of who I am and what has happened to me. I have much more to say, much more to contribute.

Q6: *In 2015 you were named to the Obama administration's inaugural class of Presidential Ambassadors for Citizenship and Naturalization, which aimed to promote naturalization among some 8 million qualified people. But some immigration groups have called Barack Obama the "deporter in chief." How is what's happening now under President Donald Trump different from what happened under the previous administration?*

GUERRERO: The rhetoric isn't the same. Look, the Obama administration deported

People need each other. They need their families. That's what the American dream is all about.

a lot of families, but Obama also tried to implement immigration reform, and he was shut down. He didn't have the Senate and the House. He tried to enact an executive order and it was blocked by the courts. He was on his own. I understand that. I'm not at all saying that separating families is okay. He just didn't have the support.

Q7: *Your advocacy includes volunteering with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center and sitting on the board of directors of Mi Familia Vota, an organization that promotes civic engagement. What does common-sense immigration reform look like to you?*

GUERRERO: We update the visa system. Have we tried to set up a path to citizenship for people who are here, who have been here for years and who have supported the economy? No. Reform involves repealing laws that are hurting people. It means coming up with ways to keep our borders secure but which also create a new way forward. It does not mean deporting 11 million people and collapsing our economy. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is a relatively new thing. We don't need ICE. We don't need another agency going after families, putting them in jail solely to have higher body counts in these centers. We don't need to be putting money into this agency. Immigration is not a crime.

A lot of immigrant families are taken advantage of because we don't know our rights. I joined the Immigrant Legal Resource Center because it focuses on education. As soon as I educated myself, I felt more powerful. I could give information to folks and direct them in a healthier way. Compare that to my parents, who hired the first bozo who offered to help them with their visas. The immigration system is convoluted and made for people to misunderstand. I just try to be a portal for information and get it out there to the folks who need it.

Q8: *Speaking of ICE, in August, on the first day of school, authorities arrested 680 people suspected of working in the country illegally across seven Mississippi food-processing plants. Videos of children crying made the rounds online and sparked debates about coverage of this issue. Some argue that it's important for the public to see this kind of imagery. Others deem it exploitative and a form of trauma porn. What's your take?*

GUERRERO: People need to see it. Honestly, it was the first time I saw an image of what I felt like the day I came home and my folks weren't there. I don't know if I felt validated, because it's difficult

saying that; I know these kids are suffering. But I felt like that's what I've been trying to tell people. That's what it feels like. It's your first day of school. You love your parents. You wish they were there with you. We need to continue sharing images like those. I go through a lot not having my parents here. They're getting older. I'm getting older. I'm missing a lot of their milestones, and they're missing mine. That stunts your growth, in a way. People need each other. They need their families. That's what the fucking American dream is all about.

Q9: *Do you still believe in the American dream?*

GUERRERO: Of course. There are so many great things about this country and so many opportunities to be had. Equality for all and justice for all: That's the American dream I want to live, where everyone is treated fairly, where families are able to stay together, where this country provides what it promises for all families — not just white families and the families at the top. That's what I'm working toward. I mean, what else am I going to do?

Q10: *Is it possible for your parents to come back to the U.S. legally?*

GUERRERO: I would love for them to. This is where it all began. This is where our life started, and I would like to finish it here with them.

Q11: *You play Crazy Jane on DC's TV series Doom Patrol, whose second season premieres on HBO Max this spring. Crazy Jane experiences childhood trauma and develops superpowers as a result. What superpowers have you developed?*

GUERRERO: Becoming someone else. Here's an example: In college, I told someone that my parents were business owners, that they were in Colombia on a business venture and I was just here studying political science because I was interested in social justice and wanted to become a lawyer. The real reason I wanted to become a lawyer was so I could bring my parents back. In terms of relating to Jane, when she allows herself to work with others and surrender to community, she finds light in that. It's similar to when I surrender to my feelings and working with others and my community.

Q12: *Have you ever felt tokenized in your career?*

GUERRERO: Yeah, in auditions for "Drug Dealer Girlfriend Number One" and "Maid Number Two." That still happens. That's why being on Doom Patrol and getting the role of Crazy Jane has meant so much to me. To have a Latinx land a role normally reserved for a white person?

Latinxs aren't allowed to be superheroes. It's the strangest thing that we can't be seen in fantasy situations. Only white people can be in fantasies? Only white people can be superheroes? That's fucking preposterous.

Q13: *Crazy Jane also has dissociative identity disorder. There aren't many pop-culture representations of mental health issues in Latinx communities. You've struggled with depression, right?*

GUERRERO: Hey, we have mental health issues. This happens in our community. This needs to be looked at. If that goes overlooked, that person is going to spend a long time trying to figure it out. Who knows where they may or may not end up? What if my parents had seen a show or movie where they talked about that? We are so informed by what we watch and what's out there and available to us. That's why we have to fight to be in these spaces.

Q14: *Describe a moment when you realized what it means to be Latinx in Hollywood.*

GUERRERO: I mean, just go out there and try to get a job. Get a job, and then try to get paid as much as your counterparts. That's when you realize you're not on the same playing field. Or you think you have an opportunity to work with a producer who says they're interested in your story, or interested in telling more immigration stories or stories that impact the Latinx community, and then you get an e-mail from this person and it starts with, "Hey, babe." That's when you realize, "Oh, I am a woman. I am a brown woman." This is still going on, and that's still something I have to fight.

Q15: *Singing, not acting, was your introduction to performing. What does music signify to you?*

GUERRERO: It's how I stay alive, man. I love singing. I haven't done it in a professional setting yet, but it's coming. Music has saved me. It's the way I connect to my ancestry, to my family. Every Sunday, my family used to put on music, clear out the furniture and dance in the living room. What those songs were saying meant something.

Q16: *Like many Latinx people born in the 1980s, you listened to a lot of Selena growing up. What does she represent to you?*

GUERRERO: She represented the new Latin American, right? A person who was connected to her culture and could express herself so deeply but could also be very American — a mash-up of two beautiful things. It's what I've always considered myself: a mashup of everything wonderful. I could speak Spanish. I could enjoy all these beauties that my culture offered, like music, dance, food and language. But I could also enjoy American music, American food and American customs. I could fucking bring those all together and just be a superhero.

Q17: *What's your favorite Selena song?*

GUERRERO: "No Me Queda Más," of course. The most intense, just mad emo song.

Q18: *You've said that growing up you tried to be the good girl to the point of harming yourself if you thought you were sinning. You're now perceived to be a sex symbol. When did you embrace your sexuality?*

GUERRERO: It wasn't until very recently. I've always been sexual, but it was once something I tried to hide because I was afraid of falling into the stereotype of the sexualized Latina who thought she could get anywhere with her sexuality or fuck her way out of any situation. I have been able to fuck myself out of a couple of situations, but that is not my go-to. My go-to is my brain and my heart and what I've learned from my family and community. That is how I've gotten ahead.

Q19: *Do you feel your activism has ever been discounted because of your sex appeal?*

GUERRERO: Latinas especially are not allowed to be sexual and smart at the same time. It wasn't until after I wrote my book that I allowed myself to feel sexy and say, "Fuck it. I don't care what you say about my breasts. I don't care about what you say about how I look." Being comfortable with my sexuality is a part of me and in the message I want to give to people about loving themselves. It all goes into how I felt about my brown skin growing up, feeling that it was ugly or less than. "A wide nose — your indigenous nose — is ugly. Your brown eyes aren't as interesting as blue ones." Shut off the noise that tells you you're not good enough or white enough, that your sexy is bad, that your sexy is crass in some way.

Q20: *When do you feel most alive?*

GUERRERO: When I'm singing or dancing. When I'm experiencing music through my veins. When I'm eating my mother's food. When those beans hit my mouth and just, I know what that is. It's life, you know? A life force for the heart. ■

senator gardner, *radical* centrist

ILLUSTRATION BY **MONICA GARWOOD**

There's a 6,000-square-foot cannabis dispensary — Euflora, the only pot shop along downtown Denver's pedestrian mall — I've been wanting to check out. But first I've got a holiday party to crash. Luckily the dispensary is a mere three-minute walk from the luxurious Brown Palace Hotel and Spa, which has hosted gold speculators, gunslinging gamblers and other colorful patrons since it opened in 1892. On this brisk evening, Colorado's junior U.S. senator has taken over one of its ballrooms.

Cory Gardner is a lawyer but not a three-piece-suit-wearing jackass. After working for his family's agricultural company in eastern Colorado and getting a law degree, he became a spokesperson for the National Corn Growers Association. Republicans tapped him in 2005 to fill a vacant seat in the Colorado House of Representatives. In 2011 he was wooed eastward for a four-year stint in the U.S. House before finally capturing a Senate seat three years later. This November he's running for reelection, likely against former Democratic governor John Hickenlooper, whom an Emerson College survey gives a more than 10-point advantage.

Colorado's Republican statesman and unexpected cannabis-industry darling is on the run—from Trump's legacy and, often, his own

BY **MATT LASLO**

But Donald Trump's advent has rendered almost all political scales obsolete. Six years ago Gardner captured one of the nation's last purple Senate seats by running as a "freethinker." Tides churned. Almost accidentally he now finds himself a Trumplican. On paper at least he has broken with the president on cannabis, immigration and foreign affairs, but his independent flashes are drowned out by loyalty to a party unrecognizable to his forebears. That makes Gardner's race feel more internal than external — almost as though he's running against his former self and all the principles he once professed to cherish.

Unlike many of his peers, Gardner, now 45, isn't a millionaire, though he occasionally lives like one. Tonight is one of those nights when it's perfectly legal, if unseemly, for him to use his Project West PAC to cover the tab for seemingly endless platters of beef Wellington, coconut shrimp and several offerings whose names I can't readily pronounce.

Besides a couple rocking matching bıkers for trump black leather vests, the room hums mostly with well-dressed donors, conservative activists and senior staffers. Down the hall, Gardner emerges from an elevator with his wife, Jaime, and their three children. He heartily greets me as if this weren't the third time I've seen him this December day.

He flashes his family a smile before encouraging them warmly, if absentmindedly, to head in without him. His wife responds with an honest frown. It appears she isn't happy being abandoned among this lot of power-hungry scavengers.

"Probably like three or four minutes," Gardner's communications director, Annalyse Keller, says of my last moments with the senator. This makes me both angry and nervous, but I'm not on the ballot.

Numerous local journalists have warned me that the senator avoids the press, and when you google "Cory Gardner reporters" the top hits include "dodges," "won't say" and "declines." His staff notoriously announces events with just hours' notice, claiming accessibility while screwing understaffed newsrooms left scrambling to cover him. After the senator went nearly 500 days without a town hall, fed-up activists sent a "Cardboard Cory" cutout on a statewide bus tour to meet with constituents. Democrats paint Gardner as a shorter Donald Trump. There's lots to discuss, but he's not eager to talk.

I was in two of Gardner's private meetings earlier, including one at a Denver passport office, which State Department employees wouldn't let me record. Later, my allotted 10-minute interview stretched to 15 after I hopped into Gardner's elevator. We talked about foreign policy because that was his focus. His staff even brought me to a gathering of the nation's top defense contractors and climate- denying Armed Services Committee chair Senator Jim Inhofe, who quietly informed these pillars of the military- industrial complex that their world is dependent on Gardner's election this fall. (*Wink wink*, cut the man a check already, was what I heard.)

Keller scooped me in the morning so I could ride with the senator between events, as I'd requested. That never happened, but for lunch, Keller and Jerrod Dobkin, communications director for Gardner's reelection campaign, spun me for about an hour.

Later it hits me: All they scheduled over my four days here were two private events and a brief interview. But playboy

flew me west to cover an issue that never came up at their handpicked meetings, which is why I'm now basically crashing a party his team never told me about.

"We haven't really talked about cannabis laws yet," I tell him in the ballroom.

"Yeah, yeah," Gardner, now donning a tie for the first time today, says, nodding.

The senator is prepared: Cannabis is his bipartisan thing. He's supposedly one of Washington's last pragmatists — or moderates, though he doesn't dare utter that M word in the Trump era. Gardner helped ease wholesale GOP opposition to marijuana after drafting the Strengthening the Tenth Amendment Through Entrusting States — or STATES — Act with Senator Elizabeth Warren in 2018. Like other proposals floating around the Hill, the legislation seeks to decriminalize cannabis federally, but it's unique in that it focuses on empowering states so they can decide their own marijuana policies once the fear of federal interference is removed. Some Democrats now distance themselves from it; they're demanding reparations, of sorts, for minority communities left ravaged by the war on drugs. To Gardner, his bill remains the only answer.

Although legalization is relatively new in Colorado, cannabis is no longer a novelty: Marijuana delivery is more sophisticated than pizza apps here. The roadblock for this burgeoning industry is federal prohibition. It's the reason heavily armed security is required to protect these all-cash operations that federally insured banks are required to shun.

Gardner's cannabis awakening came only after 55.32 percent of voters rejected his former prohibitionist stance and passed Colorado's revolutionary recreational cannabis law in 2012.

"Where are you on that personally now?" I ask.

"It's the STATES Act," Gardner replies.

"But what do you think about marijuana personally?" I press.

"The state should decide," Gardner says.

"Have you ever used it?" I ask, clawing for honesty.

"No, no," Gardner says, laughing. "You can quote that. I always thought people might use that against me."

He then dismisses my offer to try it with me.

• • •

For a decade I've witnessed Cory Gardner's evolution. His once-dark hair is now silver. As a House freshman, he earned an approval score of 82 percent from the Tea Party's FreedomWorks group. Then, as a senator in 2018, he backslid to 61 percent. Back in the House he was more conservative than independent, even supporting a fetal-personhood act — a position he conveniently disavowed in his Senate run.

After riding 2010's Tea Party wave to Washington, in 2014 Gardner ran for the Senate as a freethinker. In 2016, after the pussy-grabbing video surfaced, he "rescinded" his Trump endorsement, only to endorse him again at the start of 2019. Just as this is a new Republican Party, this is a new Cory Gardner.

Not many polls are out yet. Those that are reveal the thin reddish-purple line on which Gardner is tiptoeing. Keating Research found that an astonishing 90 percent of Colorado Republicans approve of Trump, while only 63 percent view Gardner favorably. Even as Democrats paint Gardner as a radical conservative, many Republicans consider him a sellout for deviating from Trump even once. With Gardner, it's always complicated.

Gardner is proud of Trump's judges—"I'm going to point to all the judges," he gushes over his 2020 campaign strategy including two now on the Supreme Court. In 2018 he chaired the National Republican Senatorial Committee and helped defeat centrist Democrats Claire McCaskill of Missouri and Joe Donnelly of Indiana. On climate change, he says humans are the culprits, but he has helped unwind environmental regulations. He worked with Democrats on immigration, then supported Trump's wall. The president is an isolationist, while Gardner wants engagement — though "Hillary Clinton opposed TPP," he says, defending Trump.

His political calculations, or lack thereof, have turned heads. Voters are wondering which Cory Gardner is on their ballots: Trump lapdog or centrist? He's played both parts well.

"Your brand is different than Trump," I tell Gardner.

"It is. That's right. Yeah," Gardner replies. "We ran in 2014 as a different kind of Republican, and that's exactly what we continue to be: optimistic, forward-looking, reaching out, finding solutions."

Gardner has had his moments. After then attorney general Jeff Sessions rescinded the Obama-era Department of Justice memo shielding most locally legal cannabis companies from federal enforcement, Gardner temporarily held up Justice Department nominees. Eventually he and Warren crafted the STATES Act, which garnered positive headlines for Gardner after Trump told reporters, as Marine One spewed dirt about the White House lawn, "I probably will end up supporting that, yes."

I hear "probably" because Trump is a pathological liar, at least according to fact-checkers. Gardner hears only "yes." Whether it's naivete or blind faith, he trusts Trump — even after he reversed himself on DREAMers, gun control, foreign policy and more.

"He said it to me on the phone, gosh, almost a year ago," Gardner says. "He said it to me in person many times since then."

Trump told reporters "probably" in June 2018. Some two years later, not even a tweet, even though federal prohibition has now been rejected by 33 states, the District of Columbia, four territories and some Native American tribes. As a good Republican, Gardner blames Obama: "If this was so important to them, they would have done something."

Even as he embraces such tired conservative talking points, there's an obvious disconnect between Gardner and today's GOP. That's why I'm chasing this flustered senator who remains proud of his conservative record but runs from reporters. It appears Gardner doesn't want to discuss Trump lest he mess up and say what 2016 Gardner was thinking when he rescinded his endorsement of the self-proclaimed groper in chief. In 2014 and 2016 he stood out — but after facing conservative fire, 2020 Gardner is tied to Trump. Or so his opponents think.

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By some metrics, Gardner's style is effective. The Lugar Center named him the fifth-most-bipartisan senator in the 115th Congress. Trump relocated the Bureau of Land Management to Colorado and, at least temporarily, housed U.S. Space Command here. Democrats say those are prepackaged gifts from the administration meant to divert attention from Gardner's record since Trump took office.

"I understand why they're frustrated," Gardner says. "They wanted me to be the old fuddy-dud Republican, and unfortunately, what they've seen is somebody who's effective at getting things done. I get why they're angry."

Democrats can't fathom why Gardner isn't angry. While the senator is rhetorically tough as hell on Russia and North Korea, Trump praises their oppressive leaders. If he's tried, Gardner

hasn't moved Republicans on climate change or immigration. Trump has also delivered nothing on cannabis — private assurances don't count. (Neither the White House nor members of Trump's campaign responded to numerous offers for the president to weigh in.) Of course, Democrats bitch about any Republican who has assisted Trump, especially those, like Gardner, who voted to kill Obamacare while supporting massive tax cuts. But his story is more complex.

"Compassionate conservatism" was a recent GOP mantra, but that makeover began to fade even before Trump started wielding sledgehammer-style conservatism. That's why, at least compared with Trump's rebranded GOP, Gardner looked angelic for co-sponsoring the Dream Act.

"He stuck his neck out, and I appreciated it," Dick Durbin, the number two Senate Democrat, tells playboy. "It wasn't an easy call in the age of Donald Trump. In my world, it stands tall."

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Gardner also receives praise from the cannabis industry, which becomes evident minutes into a private tour of an expansive cannabis grow in Aurora, Colorado.

As I enter the dispensary at this Terrapin Care Station (one of six), the Cheech and Chong tropes dissipate. Its warm wooden floors lend a ski-lodge ambience, and the polished display cases alert visitors that cannabis is taken seriously here. Exotic offerings abound, including Live Nectar, a crystal-like amber substance that burns more smoothly than the hundreds of joints nearby, the latter expertly labeled so users know whether they're sparking, say, a PBR or a Jameson. There is also a variety of gummies, jellies, tinctures and even THC bath salts that promise a body buzz.

Past the dispensary, Terrapin founder and CEO Chris Woods — wearing jeans, a white button-down shirt and a purple plaid sports coat—plays tour guide. As I head through the secure doors, my nostrils dance from the sweet, pugnacious aroma emanating from roughly 3,000 plants. The 35,000-square-foot facility is fitted with 216 natural lights that encourage the plants to pump out roughly 350 to 400 pounds of sticky buds monthly.

Each plant has a unique RFID tag that eventually matches the label on the products that consumers purchase, enabling health officials to trace any contaminants. One room boasts an elaborate lab where employees in blue coats and rubber gloves — along with hair and beard nets — show off vials of liquid THC and petri dishes brimming with pure THC crystals that are, except for their enticing golden glow, oddly reminiscent of crack rocks.

Around 3,000 similar, if mostly less elaborate, licensed marijuana businesses dot the state. The industry has witnessed more than $7 billion in sales over six years, reaping $1 billion in state revenue. According to my host, Cory Gardner deserves credit.

"It could very well have been the case that this industry would not exist how it is today if it weren't for Cory," Woods says.

Woods doesn't like politicians, but Gardner won his respect for battling Sessions. And Peter Marcus, Terrapin's communications director, says Gardner's mark is industry-wide.

"As a Republican standing up, pounding the dais, saying, 'I will not let these nominations go through until you respect states' rights'—those are the major talking points for the industry that you wouldn't necessarily have gotten had it been a Democrat who you expected to obviously stand up and be good on marijuana," Marcus says.

In a past life as a reporter, Marcus covered Gardner. He says numerous entities endorsed cannabis proposals after Gardner's outspoken advocacy provided cover. To him, Gardner is "a guy who's been on the wrong side of liberal issues for his entire time as a politician, going back to the statehouse. That was what was significant about it: the headlines generated from this specific man taking this to the people like that."

But even with praise coming from some surprising voices, Gardner is still saddled with a Trump-size problem.

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On a Tuesday morning in December, three days before the Brown Palace event, more than a dozen reporters — cameras, note pads and recorders in tow — huddled outside the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Inside, senators examined "The Future of U.S. Policy Towards Russia." In the past it would have been a staid, bipartisan event, but in Trump's Washington, formerly innocuous hearings generate headlines. This was evident when Mitt Romney of Utah, the 2012 GOP presidential nominee who has remained critical of Trump, made news for breaking with the president by saying—gasp!—he agreed with the nation's 17 intelligence agencies and blamed Russia, not Ukraine, for election meddling.

In between Romney and Ron Johnson, Republican of Wisconsin, sat Gardner. During the hearing he joked with both men, who represent opposite wings of today's GOP. Addressing the issue at hand, he sounded more like a classic GOP hawk than this new breed of Trump-before-all-else pols. So instead of pivoting to the middle, as Romney has, or putting his head in Trump's crotch, where Johnson's head seems to rest these days, Gardner went old school — think Iron Curtain Reagan Republican — and accused Russia of being a state sponsor of terrorism.

That's where Gardner stands out: He's constantly trying to appease moderates without alienating Trump's base. But at least for now, Trumpism has killed conservatism. That may explain why Gardner hurried into the hall after asking questions that felt out of place in Trump's Washington.

"It's always good to continue the pressure," a quick-paced Gardner told me through a nervous smile. A moment later he asked, "I went the wrong way, didn't I?"

"No," a staffer intoned.

True to form, at least these days, Gardner was hurried, running when he didn't have to. He knows Trump has transformed the GOP in his own image, shrinking its tent to such a degree that some prominent traditional conservatives no longer feel at home there. I ask him, as he has labored to carve out his own perch in this new GOP, if he has ever felt out of place.

"No, not at all," Gardner says. "I'm a Republican. I believe in getting government out of the way."

Gardner has battle scars from crawling in Trump's trenches, along with some nicks from crossing him. As the senator prepares for what may be the fight of his career, the very commander for whom he has sacrificed so much — his brand, his identity and, some say, his integrity — is the one he must fear the most. But it's impossible to distance yourself from someone like Trump, especially after being his mostly reliable rubber stamp. That's why, whether Gardner likes it or not, Colorado voters will be presented one choice in November: Vote for or against Trump. In Gardner's case, just as in the case of leaders in other battleground states, no matter how fast or how far he runs, he can't erase four years of Trump from voters' minds.

Even if, at times, it's what he desperately longs to do. ■

“I’m sorry, but sometimes my process becomes unwieldy.”

GIA VENETIA

Instagram **@giavenetia**

Photography by **Inamorata Photo | @inamorata_photo?**
MUA **Rubi Makeup & Hair | @rubimakeupnhair**
PR **LA Media Group | @la.mediagroup**

Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! Tell us about your daily schedule as a model, do you have a routine? I work out with a trainer 3x a week, focusing on upper body and glutes as well as an ab burnout and cardio. The other 2 days I will hit the gym or do yoga. I also enjoy skateboarding and roller skating.

How do you like to begin your day? I start off by brewing coffee, walking my dog Camilla, making breakfast and getting ready for the gym.

What are some of the biggest dreams you hope to achieve? I hope to fall in love, own property, have a second entrepreneurial business of some kind, invent a product, and travel the world. I'm also considering graduate school to become a therapist and have a successful private practice.

What helps you decompress and relax? Masturbating, playing guitar and singing, meditating, and watching eye-opening documentaries on Netflix.

Who has been the most influential person in your life and why? The most influential person in my life is my younger sister. She is so adventurous, free-spirited, and has a belief in herself that is unwavering. She relishes in her independence, creativity, and artistic vision.

How romantic are you? I am a hopeless romantic. I believe true love exists. I believe in feeling complete zen, fulfillment, and safety in the arms of a loyal and loving partner.

What is the most memorable date you've ever had? My most memorable date was dining at

Addison; it was my first Michelin Star restaurant. The food was absolutely phenomenal.

What was the biggest lesson from your worst breakup? Be conscientiously aware of whether someone is a narcissist or a manipulator.

Would you rather be loved, respected, or admired? I'd rather be loved. Nothing compares to feeling totally and utterly accepted by another person, by an adoring partner. Someone who wants to better you as a person and values your happiness just as much as theirs.

Are you a city traveler or nature explorer? I love exploring urban areas and the outdoors. I am enamored and in awe of skyscrapers, but I feel so at peace in a national park or a camping ground.

What's on your travel bucket list? Southeast Asia and South America.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? You can check out my website, giavenetia.com or see my live posts on Twitter, at twitter.com/gia_venetia. For exclusive content, my OnlyFans is OnlyFans.com/giaxo.

THE ART OF

ATTENTION

From injecting a sharecropper into a college kickoff to turning the Nike swoosh on its head, Hank Willis Thomas uses staples of America's ethos to comment on its inequities

BY **HENRI NEUENDORF**

Hank Willis Thomas is traveling.

This time he's in Oregon to install the first major retrospective of his work, at the Portland Art Museum. On view through January 12, 2020, the exhibit will travel to Arkansas in February and Cincinnati in July. It's a major achievement for the 43-year-old artist, a career milestone he has worked up to ever since earning his MFA from California College of the Arts in 2004. Throughout his career, Thomas has developed a reputation as one of America's most versatile and outspoken artists, using photography, sculpture, video and collaborative public art projects to raise awareness about social justice and civil rights. That range might stem, in part, from what Thomas calls "some form of ADHD."

"When I look at my survey show, it's like, Oh wow, that's definitely a broad spectrum of work," he says. "I've always hoped that people can see the connections."

A black artist who draws extensively on advertising, nostalgia and other outgrowths of pop culture, Thomas keeps his Brooklyn studio lined with shelves of meticulously organized boxes packed with back issues of iconic black-culture magazines such as *Ebony* and *Jet*, as well as retro campaign buttons and other source material. His early photographic work suggests that the collective consciousness of any society is reflected in its advertising. The poignant 2003 series *Branded*, for example, features photographs of black men marked with the Nike swoosh logo to comment on the relationships among advertising, race and consumerism.

Thomas has also explored popular entertainment, using the spectacle of professional sports as a metaphor for racism, corruption and violence. *The Cotton Bowl*, from his 2011 photo series *Strange Fruit*, juxtaposes images of a sharecropper and a black football player. The pairing serves to expose the similarities between African slaves, whose unpaid labor made generations of white Americans wealthy, and the descendants of slaves, whose unpaid work on college football teams enriches the mostly white executives of the billion-dollar sports-entertainment industry.

His sculptural pieces are no less politically charged. *We the People*, from 2015, uses patterned tapestries woven from decommissioned prison uniforms as a thinly veiled criticism of a criminal justice system that disproportionately incarcerates minorities and people of color. His 2014 sculpture *Raise Up*, which features cast-bronze figures reaching for the sky, was created in response to the killing of unarmed black men at the hands of police and is now a permanent part of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama. (The Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim and, internationally, the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia have also acquired his work.)

Speaking on the phone ahead of the Portland exhibit's opening, Thomas explains that he felt compelled to be an artist, and it's easy to see why. His mother, Deborah Willis, is a renowned photographer, a MacArthur "genius" grant recipient, a Guggenheim Fellow and current professor and chair of the Department of Photography & Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. "I can only imagine that the conversations around the dinner table must have been really interesting," says Jack Shainman, Thomas's New York dealer. "I think Hank is much further along in terms of evolution and race than a lot of us, just because he grew up in a household that was always discussing that."

Influenced by his mother's exploration of truth and reality, the artist's early work, such as his 1997 photo series *A Thousand Words*…, focuses on how the framing of images can influence context and how their meaning changes depending on what's included or left out of the frame.

A terrifying crime proved to be a turning point in Thomas's life and career. The artist's cousin, Songha Willis, was murdered during a violent robbery in Philadelphia in February 2000. In the aftermath, Thomas's resolve crystallized. "When my cousin was murdered, I felt I needed to make art that could change the world in a more intentional way," he says.

The killing inspired Thomas to focus his energy on addressing social issues. At the same time, a rapidly changing

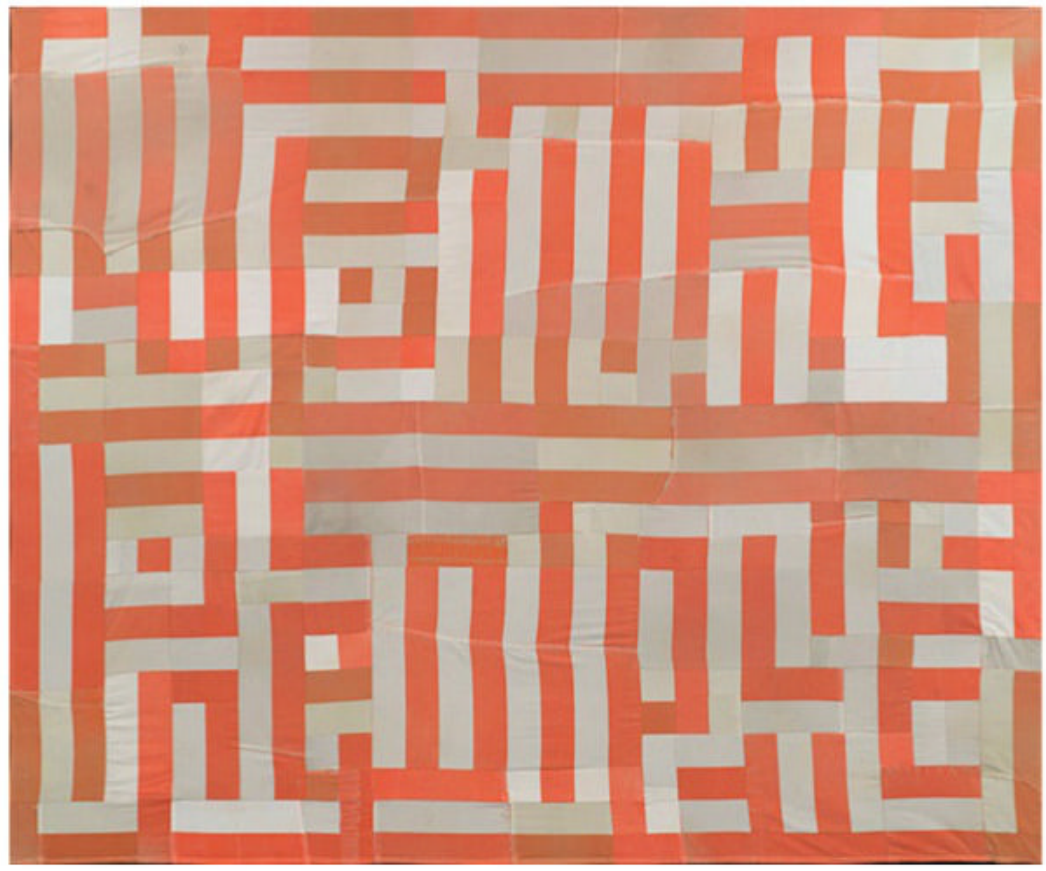
Opening pages: Crossroads, 2012, digital c-print and plexi with Lumisty film, in collaboration with Sanford Biggers. **Right:** Raise Up, 2014, bronze. **Below:** The Cotton Bowl, 2011, digital c-print.

technological landscape encouraged the trained photographer to broaden his perspective. "Most of the technical things I learned, like processing film and printing, became irrelevant," he says. "All I was left with was a way of looking at and critiquing images, so a lot of my work moved away from taking the perfect picture and toward reconsidering and reframing historical images. It has kind of taken me from photography to painting to video to sculpture to social practice."

The importance of Thomas's work, according to Julia Dolan, co-curator of the Portland show, lies in the way he excavates the past to make sense of the present. "The way he addresses the founding issues of this country is so critical to the dialogue we're having on a national scale today," she says. "We are often surprised by how his work dealing with race and bias becomes more and more relevant. He really thinks about structures in society that hold folks down, hold folks back and privilege some over others."

At a time when activism and civic engagement can be fashionable and superficial, Thomas has proven himself a uniquely active participant in the civic life within and beyond his own community. "I realized there are a lot of noncreative people shaping our reality and designing policies and laws that aren't creative," Thomas says. "And there are a lot of creative people who have abdicated their responsibility in shaping the narratives that our culture is founded on."

In 2018, For Freedoms, a super PAC Thomas founded in 2016 with his friend and collaborator Eric Gottesman, worked with



Left: We the People, 2015, quilt made out of decommissioned prison uniforms. **Opposite page:** Your Skin Has the Power to Protect You, 2008, LightJet print.

more than 100 artists—including JR, Marilyn Minter, Rashid Johnson, Tania Bruguera and Theaster Gates—to take over nearly 200 billboards across all 50 states, as well as D.C. and Puerto Rico. Artists were asked to pick an issue they cared about and make a statement that could help viewers see the world in a new light.

"Working with artists is like herding feral cats, and I say that as an artist myself," Gottesman jokes. "It was ambitious, exciting and on a scale nobody has ever really done before."

Thomas also serves on the New York City Public Design Commission, an 11-member panel of experts appointed by the mayor, which reviews permanent architecture, landscape architecture and art proposals for city-owned property. According to the New York Post, Thomas was a vocal advocate for replacing a number of Central Park public monuments of men with those of women. "These decisions that have shaped our lives have been made by urban planners and policy makers for centuries," he says. "Who is important? Who deserves to be seen, and who doesn't?"

The same questions are being raised by art institutions and a fine art industry that has excluded minorities and women for decades. This is starting to change. But like most change in the rigidly conservative art world, it's happening slowly. A 2018 study conducted by Artnet News and the art blog In Other Words found that just 2.3 percent of all artwork acquired (either by purchase or through donation) by 30 U.S. museums from 2008 to 2018 has been by African Americans, and that African American artists make up a mere 1.2 percent of global auction sales. These startling figures illustrate the critical role artists such as Thomas play in increasing the visibility of black artists — within both the American institutional landscape and the international marketplace for contemporary art.

Thomas's personal stance toward equality in the art world is not quite what his politically charged work suggests. "There are always people who are excluded and exploited," he acknowledges, "and we all need to be wide awake to our participation in ignoring important things and people." However, he continues, "the more interesting stuff always happens outside the mainstream conversation, and so I don't think we should all be rushing so quickly to be accepted by the status quo. I do recognize that I am now part of the status quo, and I have a responsibility to improve it. That includes working hard toward greater inclusion and knowing that the work is never over."

For all his enthusiasm for civic engagement and civil rights — both in his work and in his activism —Thomas's chosen mediums and conceptually rigorous approach translate into market prices that fall below those of many other artists of his generation.

Left: I Am. Amen., 2009, Liquitex on canvas. **Opposite page:** Branded Head, 2003, Lambda photograph.

In the art world, an artist's auction record can be a reliable barometer of the market's demand for their work. Artists who work across fewer mediums and approach their craft from a more decorative or colorful perspective — such as Johnson, Kehinde Wiley (who painted Barack Obama's official portrait) and Mickalene Thomas — have all achieved higher auction prices than Thomas. The highest-ever price paid for a work by Wiley is $300,000; Mickalene Thomas's top price is nearly $700,000; and Johnson's high mark stands at $1.16 million. In contrast, Thomas's auction record is $75,000.

Shainman points out that sales aren't necessarily an indicator of quality or importance, explaining that photographs and editions, which account for the majority of Thomas's work, tend to be priced lower than original paintings.

"In order for an artist to be successful today, the work has to be about ideas and also be interesting aesthetically," Shainman says. "Hank is able to balance these two things and merge them to make pieces that don't look like anybody else's — which is really important today too, since there have been so many artists who have come before us."

Grammy-winning hip-hop producer Swizz Beatz has been a collector of Thomas's work since 2018. "I first saw his amazing work online, and it was so epic," he says via e-mail. "At first sight, what grabbed me was the bold and artistic expressions in his work. Hank is a leader, a teacher, and super forwardthinking when it comes to culture and politics. I've seen Hank's growth; he's made many new big steps, and I'm super proud of him in so many ways. I feel that Hank is reflective of the future of the arts now."

Thomas's busy upcoming year is likely to give his market a boost. Asked about the demand for his work, he's ambivalent, explaining that prices "are not an actual tangible indicator of value per se." But, he admits, "we've been trained to value things that are more expensive, so when you make something people think is expensive, it automatically becomes historic and important."

Much of Thomas's work puts its metaphorical finger directly into the wound and urges its viewers to engage in difficult conversations; presumably this particular brand of candor doesn't sit well with many art collectors, who are disproportionately white. But the artist has no plans to make his work more palatable for the market. "I only know how to be me," he says. "I don't separate my art from my life."

While Thomas's outspokenness is a key part of his role as an artist, it has gotten him into trouble too. In September 2018, South African photographer Graeme Williams accused the American artist of copying his photograph of black schoolchildren and white police officers, an image that became a symbol of the end of apartheid. Speaking to The Guardian, Williams insisted that the changes in Thomas's whited-out version were "minimal" and accused the artist of "theft, plagiarism [and] appropriation."

Responding to the accusations, Thomas asks, "How do we in the age of mass and digital reproduction talk about history and visual culture?" He adds, "In books you can put quotation marks around words, attribute it to someone, and it's okay." In

At a time when civic engagement can be fashionable, Thomas has proven himself a uniquely active participant.

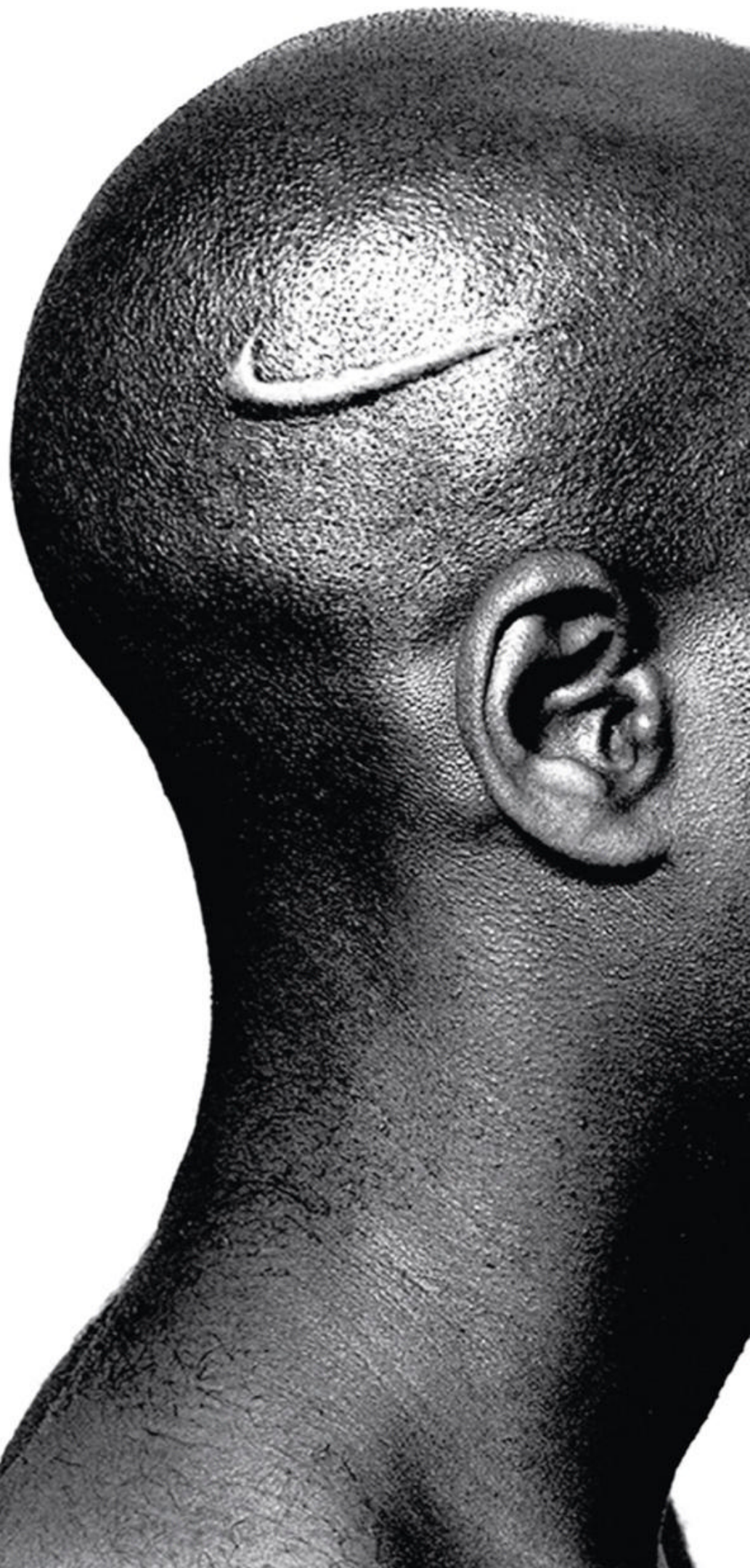
visual art, he argues, notions of authorship and the lines between appropriation and plagiarism are much harder to trace.

Perhaps this blurring of authorial boundaries is related to his willingness to collaborate. Thomas readily admits that much of his creative process is brainstormed, delegated and outsourced to historians, fabricators, writers, graphic designers and illustrators. “I think of myself more like an art director than a traditional fine artist,” he says. This is more common than it sounds. Like Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and many of the masters who came before them, contemporary artists including Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons and Yayoi Kusama maintain large workshops and studios in order to meet market demand.

Dolan says Thomas’s collaborative instinct stems from his essential human curiosity. “He’s very interested in what other people think,” she says. “He really wants to hear others and understand how they see the world to explore how his perceptions might be helped, changed or enhanced by listening and collaborating.”

Thomas’s inquisitive nature and dizzying range ultimately serve a dual purpose perfectly summed up by Gottesman, his friend for almost 20 years.

“I think he’s aware of the power of attention. That’s really what his work is all about,” Gottesman says. “It’s about criticizing how attention is garnered by larger forces in society. So on a personal level he’s always trying to bring other people in and bring new voices into the conversation.”



LOVE
OVER
RULES

Opposite page: Love Over Rules, 2018, neon. **Above:** Jungle Fever, 1991–2007, LightJet print, original photographer unknown. **Right:** Guernica, 2016, mixed media with sports jerseys.

"This doesn't mean I don't believe in freedom of speech, okay?"

“Shadow-ban this.”

Photography by **Olga Maliarchuk | @marzava_com**
MUA **Nisa Dupree**

Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! Tell us about your daily schedule as a model, do you have a routine? Thank you for having me. So happy and grateful to be a part of the Playboy family. A gym or home workout session almost always features as part of my day. Yoga is one of my favorite workouts. I carry around healthy protein-filled snacks, so I can keep my diet on track. I attend lots of auditions and casting calls to book jobs.

How do you like to begin your day? Energy-boosting breakfast, meditation and uplifting thoughts.

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? My dream is to never give up on my happiness and keep a smile on my face as genuine as possible. Also to be an inspiration to others and stand up for what I believe in.

What helps you decompress and relax? Reading, taking a bath with Epsom salt and meditating.

Who has been the most influential person in your life and why? The most influential people in my life have always been the people closest to me. My parents taught me a strong work ethic - to aim high and work hard, they inspired me and always encouraged me.

How romantic are you? I believe in love at first sight and “meant to be”.

What is the most memorable date you’ve ever had? We were walking around the city and my date suddenly lead me to a yacht club. He surprised me by having a luxury yacht ready and waiting - and a table laid for dinner. It was so romantic to dine against the backdrop of a breathtaking sunset.

What was the biggest lesson from your worst breakup? Never to doubt myself when I felt something was wrong.

Would you rather be loved, respected, or admired? Loved.

Are you a city traveler or nature explorer? Hmm, good question. Both? I guess when traveling I lean more toward nature, but can’t really escape the cities for cultural sites, museums, restaurants, and shopping.

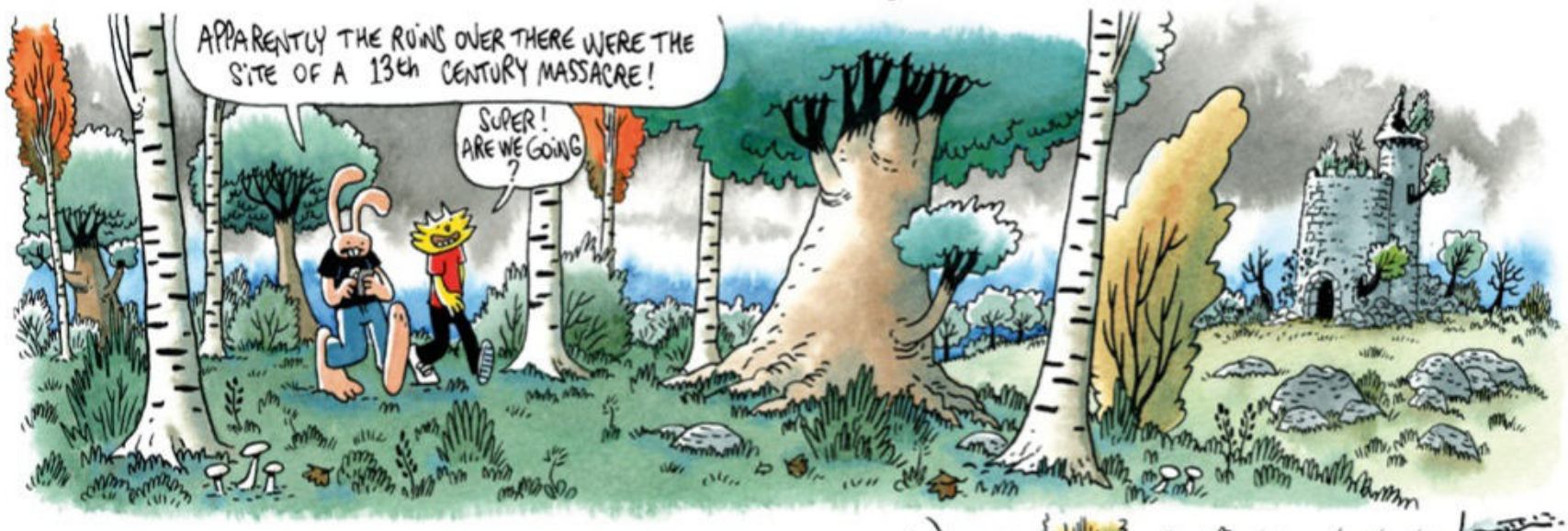
What’s on your travel bucket list? To dive on the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland, Australia. Snorkel on Komodo Island in Indonesia. Marvel at Guyana’s Kaieteur Falls.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? Follow me on Instagram @miss.rosie.ave.

A PASTORAL ADVENTURE OF LAPINOT AND RICHARD

Countrysidekick

BY LEWIS TRONDHEIM



HA HA HA!
THE FIRST ONE TO FIND SOMETHING GETS TO KEEP IT!
WOO HOO! ALL RIGHT!
HEY, WAIT!
WHAT DO YOU SEE?
NOTHING JUST YET, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING...
I FEEL IT !!!
IT JUST LOOKS LIKE A ROTTEN OLD CELLAR.
HOLD ON... WAIT... SOMETHING SPECTACULAR WILL HAPPEN.
YOU KNOW, WE'VE HAD A LOOK AROUND. UNLIKE MOVIES, REAL LIFE ISN'T SCRIPTED BY ANYONE.
MMM...
REAL LIFE STINKS !!!
NOW, HOLD ON...
YOU FOUND A MOMENT OF PURE HAPPINESS HERE. THAT'S THE REAL PRIZE.
PFFT...
THERE COULD HAVE BEEN A CRYPT !!!
A TREASURE !!!
GHOSTS !!!
BUT NO!!! NOTHING AT ALL!
BETWEEN YOU AND ME, IT'S POSSIBLE WE ENCOUNTERED OTHERWORLDLY ENTITIES...
OH, REALLY? COOL ! TELL ME!
THE SAME MICROSCOPIC FUNGI THAT GAVE HORRIBLE LUNG INFECTIONS TO THOSE WHO DISCOVERED TUTANKHAMEN !!! AND WE'LL DIE TWO WEEKS FROM NOW !!!
- End of chapter one -

a very **millennial** scandal

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KANYA IWANA**

Sex, nudes and social media took down the woman who represented a moderate future for Democrats. Now she's ready to stand up again, freer than ever

BY **ANITA LITTLE**

In early October, in the quiet commuter town of Santa Clarita, California, I spent a balmy afternoon with then congresswoman Katie Hill. It was exactly two weeks before intimate photos of her began to trickle out of the dark, far-right corners of the internet and about three weeks before she would announce her resignation.

At that time, this story was shaping up to be very different from the one you're about to read. I would shadow Hill, a Democrat, throughout the valley she calls home, giving an inside look at the challenges young women face when they enter the political sphere. I would observe the bright, shiny parts, such as Hill meeting special-education students at a local elementary school, giving a commencement address at a college and attending a charity fund-raiser for children with cancer. I would hear tip-of-the-iceberg hints of her struggles, such as fighting to speak without being interrupted at a Chamber of Commerce meeting and being told to smile more by constituents. I wasn't expecting anything to twist the arc I had already outlined of a millennial woman ascending to the halls of power.

Then, on October 17, I received a call from a staffer who sounded harried, asking that I refrain from mentioning in the piece Hill's ongoing divorce from Kenny Heslep, her partner of nearly 10 years. It was implied he had become increasingly volatile. I felt apprehensive after the call; I sensed something was coming but wasn't sure what it might be.

The next day, the conservative site Red- State published a blog post detailing a consensual polyamourous affair the congresswoman and Heslep had had with a campaign staffer. The post also included a nude photo of Hill. It was soon followed by a piece in the British tabloid Daily Mail, where more photos were released. They spread across social media like wildfire —just as multiple literal fires were raging across southern California.

"We found out they had 700 more files," Hill would later tell me over the phone. "I just didn't know how long this was going to go on, or what else they were going to have, or how I was going to be able to do the work that mattered to people in my district."

Suddenly, a story that was supposed to be straightforward was radioactive. No one knew how to address this uniquely millennial "sex scandal," and few wanted to touch it. A local assemblyperson who had agreed to be interviewed backed out. A member of Congress whom I'd already spoken to scrambled to retract their statements. On-the-record sources quickly became background or off the record completely. By the time I filed, Hill had given her farewell address from the floor of the House of Representatives, and Heslep, according to his father, had denied leaking the images, claiming he'd been hacked. I watched in real time as

Hill's freshman promise was taken down in a dazzling conflagration that could only exist at the intersection of sex, power and technology. Hill was part of a great new hope, a wave of young progressives who had been ushered into the 116th Congress in the aftermath of Hillary Clinton's presidential loss in 2016. Her underdog campaign was proof of the resilience and resourcefulness of millennials — proof that when we fight, we can sometimes win.

For Hill's generation in particular, her ousting sparks a special kind of dread; it feels either very familiar or very possible. Millennials are the internet generation, after all. As Republican congressman Matt Gaetz suggested in a tweet amid the scandal, who among us would look good if a vengeful ex-lover shared every intimate photo or text? In this brave new digital world, lapses in judgment and moments of abandon are forever catalogued, waiting to be deployed should someone ever come into power or just happen to be a woman.

"I hate that they won. I hate that I did end up quitting, but the GOP made it clear that they were going to continue this until I quit," Hill says.

By the time this profile hits newsstands, I imagine people will likely have come to their own conclusions. So this isn't just a story about Katie Hill the victim of alleged revenge porn, or Katie Hill the hashtagged

cautionary tale. This is about Katie Hill the congresswoman — the Katie Hill her 700,000 constituents lost when she was driven out by cyber exploitation. And this is about Katie Hill the survivor.

• • •

The first time I formally met Hill was in her Santa Clarita office. The space was sparsely decorated save for a few framed photographs, one of which was of the nearby Vasquez Rocks. Hill occupied offices across the 25th Congressional District, about a half hour north of Los Angeles and comprising the cities of Santa Clarita, Palmdale, Lancaster and Simi Valley.

Hill has a direct manner of speaking that some might describe as brusque. She often wears a severe, unflappable expression that has been referred to as "resting bitch face," otherwise known as "a face" on men. She walks at a fleet-footed pace, opting to take the stairs whenever she can; as a public official, she never had time to exercise. In a different world these characteristics would be genderless, but during her time as a candidate and then a congresswoman, they took on a weight she often found exasperating.

"You instantly have criticism about every single bit of your attire, your face, your makeup, your hair," she said, gesturing toward the tightly secured bun sitting atop her head.

When the now 32-year-old Hill unseated Republican incumbent Steve Knight in November 2018 in a hotly contested race, the win made national headlines. Someone who never thought she would be a politician was thrust into a spotlight that felt all the more blinding because she was a woman and even more so because she was openly bisexual and the first LGBTQ congresswoman from California. This was no small feat in a district where Proposition 8, the same-sex-marriage ban, had passed overwhelmingly just a decade earlier.

Hill recalled other LGBTQ representatives advising her to pass as straight. "They said, 'You're married to a man. Why would you come out as bi?' "

In the year following her election, the former nonprofit director spent her days shuttling back and forth across her district and the country. Spending more than half her time in Washington, D.C., Hill turned into a nomad in her hometown — the place where she learned to ride a horse, experienced young love and suffered through the requisite ill-advised bob cut of late girlhood. The confusion that accompanies such a lifestyle shift became evident when she mistakenly referred to Washington as her home before catching herself. "I'm literally on a plane, on an average week, for 12 hours," she told me.

A closer look at the district she represents reveals communities that are so disparate, it's astounding she engaged enough voters to pull off a win. There's upper-middle-class Santa Clarita with its beloved Six Flags Magic Mountain theme park; the high-desert cities of Palmdale and Lancaster with their growing Latino populations; and traditionally conservative Simi Valley, a bedroom community for Los Angeles County police. Hill mentions the 1992 trial there of the LAPD officers charged with use of excessive force during their arrest of Rodney King — and the L.A. riots following their acquittal.

The demographics of the district are difficult to thumbnail, but so is Hill. She's a gun owner, an outspoken member of the LGBTQ community, a goat farmer, a sexual-assault survivor, a proud community college graduate and the daughter of a cop who cast his first vote for a Democrat when she ran.

As I trailed Hill through an average day in the district, attending speaking engagements and meetings at places that ranged from a virtually all-white country club to the diverse California Institute of the Arts campus to a majority minority trade school, I witnessed her seamlessly navigate the different enclaves. For the college visit she sported a T-shirt and jeans. Upon arriving at Valencia Country Club for a Chamber of Commerce town hall and spotting a DRESS CODE ENFORCED stencil on a window, she grabbed a suit from a staffer's car kept on hand for just such an occasion.

Besides the code-switching required of any politician who represents a district as mixed as the 25th, Hill's biggest challenge was translating to her constituents the work she does on Capitol Hill — namely, her push for affordable housing and health care reform. In an age of fringe politics, she often comes across as a kitchen-table moderate.

"When the two most commonly known names are Donald Trump and AOC, and people tend to associate an entire group with one or the other, I don't think that's necessarily healthy," she said. "A lot of what's happening in the middle, which is the majority of the country, is not amplified."

I asked Hill if the ascent of Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as the most recognizable face of the Democratic Party had led to misperceptions. She replied that some people have the responsibility to "push us as far as we can go," but it's not usually a reflection of where the party currently leans.

"Her policies are the extreme of our party," she added of Ocasio-Cortez. "People have associated that the Democrats want to have the Green New

Deal, right? But they don't know that we also have all these other, more immediately achievable solutions to addressing climate change."

Hill's pragmatic progressivism was what made her stand out in a divided Congress and what our political landscape will sorely miss with her resignation. Following her win in 2018, she quickly built a reputation as a bridge, with D.C. outlets touting her unusual ability to cross the aisle. She represented something Capitol Hill has lacked since Republicans won back the House during Barack Obama's first term.

• • •

On the afternoon of our first interview in October, Hill asked if she could hitch a ride with me back home. I assumed she meant the three-acre Agua Dulce ranch she once shared with her former partner. Instead she directed us to a quiet residential street in Santa Clarita lined with craftsman houses. As we pulled into the driveway, a German shepherd named Thaddeus bounded up to greet Hill, followed by her mother.

In the midst of her divorce from Heslep, the politician whose campaign Vice News termed "the most millennial ever" was doing a very millennial thing: moving back in with her parents.

Unlike most citizens, Hill didn't have the luxury of riding out the tough moments of divorce in private. As soon as she was elected one of the 435 representatives in the House, her life became openly dissected and derided for all who disagreed with her political affiliations.

"It's a weird thing, that you have to navigate being public, because it is public, right? He filed, and it was immediately picked up in the media," she told me at the time.

Hill is unsure if she'll ever consider marriage again. In light of everything that has unfolded, it would be short-sighted to assume her career didn't factor into the end of her relationship.

"If I want to be good in this role, I will not be in a position of ever putting someone else's needs first," she said. "In the pyramid of things, it's going to be my constituents, then myself, to be able to live. And then your partner comes after that."

I didn't ask about Heslep again.

• • •

Three days after her resignation, I call Hill as she prepares to leave Washington, vowing to take her battle "outside the halls of Congress" in a heartfelt video posted on Twitter. The crisis is still fresh, the hurt still raw, and she hasn't had time to reflect. She hasn't spoken to other reporters yet, and she preemptively apologizes if she sounds "mildly incoherent."

Hill tells me a few freshmen members of Congress are planning something for her that

> "This is a true **threat.** This is its own form of **assault."**

evening. Her voice cracks as she struggles to find the words to describe it, perhaps wanting to avoid "good-bye party" or anything that feels final. Sighing, she settles on "little get-together."

She has been actively steering clear of Capitol Hill, lying low for security reasons, to dodge reporters and because "emotionally, it's been pretty tough."

She worries about other young women and girls who may decide not to run for public office after witnessing what she went through. Regardless of the relationship with her campaign staffer, her fate was decided by the photographs — not because of a consensual polyamorous relationship. If not for the proliferation of these images, it's likely Hill would still be in office.

"That's the thing I'm most concerned about," she says. "There's a whole generation of us who have pictures that could be compromising. It's normal, right? It's not even, 'Oh, it's so salacious.' Everybody does it."

In Hill's case, the photos were published without her consent or knowledge, but the average millennial would barely bat an eyelash at the willing exchange of such images — emphasis on willing. A 2017 study from the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative found that roughly one in eight participants had been either victims of or threatened with "nonconsensual pornography." Our nation's laws are fighting to keep up: Forty-six states, Washington, D.C. and the U.S. territory of Guam have passed legislation that criminalizes the publication of revenge porn.

Hill, who worked in the nonprofit sector before running for Congress, plans to partner with an advocacy organization to raise awareness of the havoc revenge porn can wreak. "The emotional trauma that it causes people is pretty much untold. This is a true threat. This is its own form of assault," she says.

Hill wasn't the only one who faced harassment with the release of the photos; staffers in her congressional and district offices had to field an onslaught of offensive phone calls.

"They'll talk to the staff and be like, 'Will you tell Katie Hill I want in on one of the threesomes she's having, but also she should get a boob job?' "

Ultimately, it wasn't sensational headlines or harassment on social media that prompted her decision to resign. It was her mother's advice.

"She said to me, 'You've done a ton, and you're going to be able to do more, but at the end of the day, you don't have to put yourself through this. You're young.' She always sees me as her daughter first, and she saw how awful it was."

Hill says her mom frequently sends her inspirational memes, the saccharine kind many of our boomer-age mothers exchange on the social media graveyard of Facebook. After our call, she forwards me one her mother shared with her when she was considering resignation.

"When something goes wrong in your life, just yell 'plot twist' and move on," shouts the digital pep talk in a funky font.

Hill, who admits that she could be more appreciative of her parents, seems comforted by these words.

"This is a big plot twist, so let's see what the character makes of it," she says. "That's my job."

Before we end the call, I ask whether, despite everything that has happened to her, she might consider running for political office again. I brace for a measured no — an echo of what we've heard from other female politicians cheated out of an elected position, such as Stacey Abrams and even Hillary Clinton. She replies, "Obviously, I'm going to need some time away, but it's almost something I want to do on principle."

She suggests there might be some freedom in having her private life tossed out into the world. With no skeletons left to uncover, she could become unassailable.

"Every single bit of my dirty laundry will be out there — the most private things I didn't ever think would come out. I'll be quite literally fully exposed to the voters," she says with a laugh. "So judge me for what I've got."

She finishes the thought: "This was a chapter that was important and that meant something. I think I have a legacy that is going to matter. This is just the beginning." And with that, her very milliennial political scandal ends with an ageless political message: hope. ■

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